



THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

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No. 13.

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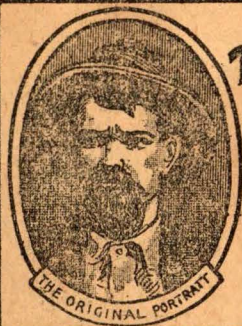
JESSE JAMES IN CHICAGO

OR THE BANDIT KING'S BOLD PLAY



BY W.B. LAWSON

"CAPTAIN, I CALL UPON YOU TO ARREST THAT MAN. HE IS JESSE JAMES, THE OUTLAW OF MISSOURI."



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No. 13.

NEW YORK, August 3, 1901.

Price Five Cents.

JESSE JAMES IN CHICAGO;

OR,

The Bandit King's Bold Play.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER I.

ALEXANDER BLACKMORE, BANKER.

The Bowery of Chicago can well be found in South Clark street, branching off to a portion of State street.

It certainly equals the notorious part of New York after which it has been called, when once the night descends, and gaslight succeeds the searching glare of day.

Dens are plenty, wickedness abounds and crime goes rioting on in spite of the police who patrol this district.

It is a cesspool of sin—scenes are of common occurrence that must wring the heart of any one unaccustomed to seeing such things.

Young men of promise wreck their lives in these dens, and many a time have fathers sought wayward sons here, trying to wrest them from their base idols.

I am a detective.

It has been my duty to engage in many of the strange scenes nightly occurring in this crime-stained section of Chicago.

Once I was very much concerned over the awful sights I saw there, but it is true that familiarity breeds contempt, and I have looked upon these same scenes until they have grown wearisome to me, and stale.

Strange adventures have befallen me during my career of more than twenty-five years as a detective.

I think that the oddest series of adventures I ever experienced took place more than a decade ago.

It is in the seventies that I write of.

Chicago at this time was reckoned a young giant, though hardly half her present size.

In proportion to her population she may be safely put down as the wickedest city on the continent—a modern Sodom.

It is on one dark afternoon, and with the gas lighted in my office, I am busily engaged looking over the papers in a case which I expect to engage my attention, when a gentleman is shown in by my office clerk.

He is a man of middle age, rather heavily set, with the appearance of a well-to-do banker.

Such I set him down.

His face is smoothly shaven, all but an iron-gray mustache, which he gnaws in a nervous manner when talking.

I like the looks of the gentleman, and feel drawn toward him by some magnetic power.

He advances to me.

"Mr. Lawson?" he asks.

"William Lawson, detective, at your service," I reply, pushing a chair toward him, into which he sinks a trifle wearily.

"My name is Alexander Blackmore."

I recognize it as belonging to a banker who is reputed to be worth a million.

"Glad to meet you, sir. In what way can I serve you?" I ask, quietly.

It is no use endeavoring to surmise what his mission may be—there are a dozen chances to guess at—so I wait.

The portly banker turns his head—he finds the door tightly closed.

"We are quite alone here, Mr. Lawson?"

"Entirely so, sir."

"No one can overhear us?"

"It is utterly impossible."

"Whether you engage to assist me or not, you will keep my secret professionally?"

"I engage to do so, Mr. Blackmore."

He draws a deep sigh.

I am unable to determine whether it is relief at my assurance, or a sort of bracing up of the nerves to the sticking point.

Perhaps a little of both influences him.

He clears his throat to speak.

"Mr. Lawson, I have a boy."

Ah! that tells the story; his son has gone to the bad, and he desires to see me in the effort to reclaim him.

Well, I have acted in that capacity a number of times before, sometimes with success, and again, being overcome with the tide of sin, losing the game because the young man is beyond hope.

I feel sorry for the banker.

"I seek you in a double sense, Mr. Lawson. You will hear my story patiently?"

"Yes, indeed; proceed, sir."

"My son's name is Robert; he has grown to be a young man of late years, and although living in this great city, has never really been what you would call wild; in fact, Bob is a splendid fellow—a son any father would be proud of.

"Until last night I have never known the first cause of worry; and then there came upon me a hurricane that swept my feet from under me.

"Bob sought an interview with me.

"He told me he was in love; in fact, that he had asked a lady to be his wife, and now came to me to beg my indulgence.

"She belonged to the profession; was an actress, in fact, but no one had ever dared to cast a slur upon her spotless name.

"Then he told me her name; it is Rebecca Marsden.

He speaks the name with a groan. I am unable to comprehend his feelings, for the young lady in question has an enviable reputation, both as an actress and a private person.

"What are your objections to Miss Marsden?"

"Objections. Heavens! my dear sir, I have none to tell you, lady, but—you don't know."

"Of course not; explain."

"He showed me her picture, and it settled me. I began to ask him questions, and learned the whole story.

I prepare for something startling, and am not disappointed in the matter.

"Years ago I was divorced from my wife. It does not matter what the cause was, but she agreed to a separation, and the child came to me, and has believed his mother dead.

"I learned afterward that she had married again, for she was known as a Mrs. Perry, and had a child—a girl named Rebecca."

At this I gave an exclamation.

The whole thing looms up before me, and I see why Alexander Blackmore is troubled.

He has good cause to be, since fate has dealt him such a serious blow.

"I found out that there was no question about the matter. Bob described Rebecca's mother, and I recognized my wife—his mother."

"That is singular. Does she know him?"

"Unquestionably, although she has not revealed her identity to him. He says she seems to think a great deal of him, and watches his every action with the deepest concern."

As he says this he groans.

I feel very sorry for him.

"You understand, Lawson, this thing cannot come to pass. The girl he loves can never be his wife, for she is his half-sister."

"Exactly. But why has her mother allowed this thing to go so far?"

He shakes his head.

"It is hard for me to believe that she has descended to such a desire for revenge; that was never a part of Mary's character."

"She may not dream of the consequence, and since

desires to see her two children friends," I suggest, as a possible truth.

He groans and presses his hands to his head.

"It may be so, but it is hard on poor Bob, and the girl must suffer, too."

"What do you desire me to do, sir?"

At this he looks quickly up.

His face assumes an expression I do not like to see, for there is something of ferocity about it—most men have a little of the tiger in their composition, and this has been aroused in Blackmore by the danger that menaces his darling boy.

"Separate them, Mr. Lawson; at any cost they must be separated!" he exclaimed.

"Have you any plan as to the best method to be employed in the matter?"

"No; but I leave that to you. Spare my boy, as much as you can, but let it be effectual. The girl may be innocent of wrong intentions, but she must not ruin his life. Perhaps you will have to make him believe a lie—that she is not worthy of his honest love—and yet I hate to do that."

"Why not tell him the truth?"

He moves uneasily in his seat.

"There are reasons why I would rather Robert did not know the story of the past. Naturally he would be deeply interested in his mother, and you see it is deucedly awkward for a man to meet the woman who was once his wife. The whole story would have to be raked over again, and its unpleasant details brought up. Besides, such a dear fellow, I have always been haunted by a suspicion that I wronged Mary. The evidence was strong against her, and she would not deny it in court, but alone with me she looked in my eyes, and said solemnly, 'I am innocent.'"

"Many years have flown, but I have never forgotten the look on her face; it will go with me to my grave." He shudders.

I lay my hand on his arm, for somehow this man's strange story has excited my interest, even accustomed I am to peculiar things in this line.

"Pardon me, Mr. Blackmore, but under the circumstances what is to hinder a complete reconciliation between you all? In finding a sister the young man will get his sweetheart."

"It is utterly impossible."

"How so? You say you are more than half convinced of her innocence."

"True, but with my own hand I have raised a barrier between us."

He lets his head fall as if ashamed.

"In what way, sir?"

"I have married again."

"Oh!"

"Only a year or so ago, while traveling in Missouri, I met and married a young girl. Men will be fools sometimes, you know, and I suppose my hour had come for it."

"The circumstances under which I met and won the present Mrs. Blackmore were peculiar. I need say no more beyond the fact that she was the daughter of a man who kept an inn among the Missouri hills, and that she saved my life."

"Perhaps gratitude entered into the matter."

"I have myself thought so more than once, for the affection I feel for Meta is fatherly. She is even younger than Bob, you know."

The case is now laid before me.

I ask a few questions and am done, my plans being partially arranged.

Naturally I have decided to see the banker's divorced wife first, and find out what she intends doing in the matter.

There is no need of my telling him all—the time for that will be after the work is done.

I have managed far more difficult cases than this in the past, and see no reason why the game should get ahead of me.

The banker has recovered in some degree from his emotion, and now sits looking at me as though he would fathom my thoughts.

"I will do my best for you, Mr. Blackmore. Possibly I may make a report to-morrow," I say.

Upon his face I see a muscular contraction as though he suffers from some nervous complaint. It is not always your thin men who are victims to their nerves.

"I say, Lawson!"

"Yes, sir."

"If you can possibly arrange it without besmirching the girl's reputation, do so. Only hold on to that as a *dernier ressort*."

"You may be sure I will, sir."

"Even to save my darling boy pain, I hate to throw mud upon a girl's fair name, and I sincerely trust you will find another way of reaching the same end."

"I see a chance of doing it already; but, until I have had an opportunity of putting it into practice, prefer not to disclose it."

He shrugs his shoulders in a French way.

"Suit yourself, my good fellow. Be sure I have looked up your ability before coming, for this is a business I would be unwilling to trust to every Tom, Dick and Harry."

"I am honored by your patronage. Until to-morrow, then, I will say good-by."

"Oh!" he says, smilingly, "there is another matter

which I wish to ask your advice about while I am here, Mr. Lawson."

CHAPTER II.

REBECCA'S MOTHER.

"I am ready to hear what you have to tell me, sir," I make answer.

"It concerns a mysterious robbery that took place at my house."

"You have not informed the police?"

"No; from various reasons, chief of which was a terrible thought that entered into my mind. I might as well admit that a suspicion came to me that perhaps—hang it, how can I tell you? I even suspected my Bob."

"I would be sorry if such should prove to be the truth, sir. Still, young men will at times be thoughtless, and in a moment of temptation do things that cause lifelong regret."

"Oh, I know that from my own experience. Have I not eaten my heart out these years?" he says, in a miserable tone.

"Tell me the circumstances, sir."

"I will. Though a banker, I have somehow fallen into the habit of keeping a large sum of money in my house, having a safe in the library. At times this has even run up in the thousands, and two days ago I had twenty-three hundred dollars in that little safe."

"Yesterday I had occasion to draw a small sum out, and to my intense amazement I found every dollar gone."

"The safe was broken open during the night?"

"Entered, not broken open."

"Still, you found the door ajar?"

"On the contrary it was shut fast. In response to the combination it opened, to show me an empty space where the money had been."

"No ordinary burglars there."

"The house was locked up and every window fastened as usual," he replies, sadly.

"Who knows the combination, sir?"

"Only Bob."

"I am sorry to hear that."

"And yet it is utterly impossible for me to believe him guilty."

"Naturally so; you are his father. Let me ask a few more questions. Do you ever keep track of bills in your possession?"

"I do. There was a peculiar circumstance in connection with a number of these bills that might serve as a clew."

"What was it?"

"They had a number in red ink written on one side; some crank probably did it for a reason beyond my ken."

We often come across queer things in our banking experience."

"Do you remember the number?"

"It was sixty-seven."

"That may serve as a clew to run down the guilty party. I will make a note of it. You declare the safe was locked and no signs of any one having come in by a window?"

"I swear to it."

"You also remember seeing the bills—when?"

"The last time I set eyes on them was on the previous night—Bob was out! I sat in the library making up some accounts to balance, when Meta, my wife, came in and asked if it was not time I gave over work and sought rest."

"Ah! yes, go on, please."

"I said I would as soon as I had balanced my cash account. Then I took out the bills, counted them over, found the amount right to a penny, carefully placed them in the safe, closed the door, and it was secured."

"Meta, your wife, waited for you?"

He glances quickly at me, but I am looking in another direction and do not pretend to even see the look of alarm flash over his face.

"Yes, but——"

I do not wish him to finish his sentence, knowing the question it must contain.

"Pardon me again, Mr. Blackmore. I am about to ask a singular question."

"Yes," with the look of alarm deepening.

"Looking back over your past do you happen to know whether you were ever addicted to the strange habit of somnambulism?"

Immediately a wave of relief comes over his face, and causes a smile to appear.

He thinks I have passed the danger signal and has noticed the red flag of distress in his face.

"I have a dim memory of having played some of the pranks as a boy."

"Walking in your sleep?"

"Yes. I lived with an old aunt, and one night—bright moonlight one, I recollect—they found me seated on top of the chimney in my night clothes, as solemn as an owl."

"Another time they came upon me wandering in the neighboring graveyard; I sent the old sexton into a spasm, for he believed it to be a spirit walking about."

"So you see I can answer your question in the affirmative. I was once addicted to somnambulism, although it has been two score years since my last exploit."

"Nevertheless, the habit may remain."

"It is possible."

"Now, have you the slightest reason to believe t

you had an attack of this kind night before last—the night of the robbery?”

He knit his brows.

Evidently he would like to remember something of the kind, but fails to do so.

“I regret to say I do not.”

“That I am sorry for. At the same time you may have done it without leaving any evidence of the fact behind you.”

“Yes, yes.”

“You understand, this is only a surmise on my part, but I have known just such a case.”

“If I catch your meaning, you suspect that while walking in my sleep I took the money out of the safe, and removed it to a hiding-place that seemed more secure?”

I desire him to think this way, in order to cover up another suspicion I entertain.

So I ask more questions in a guarded way.

Finally Alexander Blackmore leaves me.

It lacks but a few minutes of six; time a regular old bachelor like myself should think of a good, hot supper.

Ten minutes later finds me in my place of eating; a restaurant I have frequented for years, on Randolph, near State.

While enjoying the meal set before me, I arrange a certain plan of action.

The game is new.

Until I get deeper into it, I cannot expect to understand the details.

My first object is to visit the mother of the girl, and, having her address, I reach the flat at a little after seven.

It is my hope to find her in, as I understand she accompanies her daughter to the theatre.

In this I am fortunate.

The lady receives me in her parlor, quite a lovely little room.

At first sight I am impressed. She seems a fitting picture to the frame, as sweet a lady as I ever set eyes on, with a gentle face, and the most truthful of eyes.

No wonder Blackmore declared he could never forget the look she gave him when he was parting from her forever.

I know he must have wronged her, but that is all in the lead past. He cannot come to her now because he has put a barrier up—Meta, his young wife, stands between. She looks at me wonderingly.

“You do not know me, Mrs. Perry, but I have business of importance with you, as I wrote upon my card,” I hasten to say.

“You—a detective,” half holding her breath, as if fearful of a coming trouble.

“Yes! you have a daughter!”

“Rebecca!”

How she takes the alarm!

I feel sorry already that I have to cause her trouble and worry, but it cannot be helped.

“Yes, it is in connection with her that my visit to you is made.”

“What is wrong? She has done nothing, I trust,” with her hand pressed upon her bosom, as if to still the wild throbbing of her heart.

“Bless you; no, madam. Allow me to explain. Unless I am mistaken, there is a young man who visits your daughter.”

“You mean Robert—Mr. Blackmore?” quickly, with the blood rushing to her white cheeks, for is he not her own boy, and has she not loved him in secret all these months without betraying the truth.

“Yes, he is the man I mean. He loves Rebecca.”

She nods her head silently.

“And your child cares for him?”

“It is true—it is true.”

“Madam, your name was not always Perry.”

At this she is visibly affected.

“Before I married——”

“You were once Mary Blackmore.”

At this, knowing that I have her secret, she bows her head, and will not look up for some time.

“I am here in the interest of that young man’s father, Alexander Blackmore.”

“He sent you?”

“Yes.”

“For what purpose?”

“Madam, can you ask? He has learned of his son’s mad attachment, knows who you are, and is determined to prevent what destiny would bring about. This thing can never be.”

“I had even hoped,” she began, and finishes her sentence with a sigh.

“This attachment must be broken off.”

“It is late to do it. Wounded hearts must follow such an act.”

“Still it cannot be helped. The blame rests with you, madam, for you know the truth”—she shuddered, and I hated myself for giving her pain—“and we expect you to be the one to undo the wrong.”

“How can I?”

“I will take Bob in hand if you can cure the girl. Get her to believe he is unworthy of her, that he has even done something to forfeit his father’s confidence.”

I cannot find the heart to tell her the truth respecting Robert, for she is his mother.

Even as it is she suffers exceedingly.

“You mean that I must make her believe him a villain. Of all persons I should be the last to do this. It

is doubly cruel. Truly his revenge has followed me far."

"And yet you will do it?"

"If all other means fail me. Yes, I will even do this, since he orders it. I will cause Robert to hate his own mother. Anything to prove to his father that, though thoughtless in the past, yet I was innocent."

"I would take this painful task upon myself, but I fear she would not believe me."

"You may be sure she would not. She has the greatest faith in Robert, and even I may have trouble in making her believe the story."

"Madam, you are a brave woman, and I leave this task to you with regret. You should have seen your duty clear before; it would have saved you and yours much suffering."

"True, true; but the temptation was strong. I wanted them to love each other."

I cannot fathom her motives, for they seem a little cloudy to me; but I believe she is a charming lady, and if her daughter—

My reflections at this time are interrupted, for at this moment Rebecca enters.

As I look at the radiant yet earnest face I cannot wonder at Robert's infatuation.

She is a woman in a thousand, and even an old rusty bachelor like myself cannot fail to see and appreciate her charms.

"Mother, are you nearly ready? Robert will soon be here, and you know—I beg pardon, I did not see you had company."

I get upon my feet and bow, feeling like a guilty creature in her presence, for have I not come here to rob her of her lover.

"A business friend, child—Mr.—" consulting my card again—"William Lawson."

Again I bow politely.

Rebecca leaves us with a laugh, telling the elder lady not to be late.

I have little more to say, for my heart is already sick of the whole business; besides, I have my own share of the work to do, since the actress' mother has agreed to only accomplish one-half of the affair.

So I respectfully take my leave, assuring her of my sympathy, and begging that she will look upon William Lawson as a well-wisher in case she ever needs a friend.

CHAPTER III.

THE DETECTIVE OPENS THE GAME.

Next I must see Bob.

He is a very important character in the case, and I mean to meet him speedily.

At the door of the theatre where Rebecca Marsden is

playing a very successful engagement in a stock company, preparatory to starring it during the coming season, I await their arrival.

Knowing the stage entrance well, I am not misled, and a little before eight see a hack arrive, from which two ladies and a gentleman alight.

These are they whom I seek.

As the ladies enter the theatre, the gentleman lingers to speak to the driver.

Just as he is brushing past me I touch him on the arm.

"Mr. Robert Blackmore."

"Ah! what is wanted?"

He turns.

The light falls full upon his face, and I see a young man I love on the spot. His countenance is so frank and manly, although not handsome.

I would do much to save him.

"Can I have a few words with you in private?"

He glances at me, then toward the stage door, through which his divinity has just passed.

"Excuse me, some other time must suffice."

"It must be now, sir."

"Must be?" he echoes, frowning; these young chaps do not like a necessity.

"My business is of the utmost importance; it concerns yourself, your father, your reputation, yes, and the girl who has just left you."

He hears me through and shows only surprise until reach the end; at mention of Rebecca he draws near and clutches my arm.

"What have you to say about her, man?"

"Much that you should hear immediately. More than you dream of hangs upon it."

He looks about him cautiously.

Men jostle us in hurrying by.

"This is no place to talk secrets," he says, impressed by my manner.

"I know a quiet nook just over the way. Will you go there with me?" indicating a fancy bazaar and ice cream saloon.

"Yes; I presume it would be better; if you have anything to tell me, the sooner it is over the better."

Does he suspect anything?

I am unable to say, and yet feel that he does.

We cross over the street.

My thoughts have been flying with the rapidity of lightning, and already I have changed my contemplative mode of attack.

It will never do to tell this man that Rebecca is unworthy of his love; he will kill me if he finds out I have deceived him.

Of this I am convinced.

What remains to me?

I must tell him the whole truth, even though it brings pain to his father; that will open his eyes to the fact that he must look upon Rebecca Marsden as his sister.

The sooner this part of my business is accomplished, the quicker I will be able to pick up the other thread and discover who took the banker's roll of bills from his safe.

We enter the bazaar.

In the back room we find a quiet corner and are soon served with cream and cake.

"Begin," says Robert, impatiently.

Every minute away from his charmer is agony to his mind; I know it all, having been through the mill a dozen or so times myself.

"In the first place, my card."

He glances at it, then at me keenly.

I do not see the look of alarm I half expected.

"Ah! a detective."

"I come to you after a painful interview with your father; at least, it was so to him."

"What does he say?"

"That your union with Rebecca Marsden is impossible; it is against the laws of nature."

"How so? She is not a wife?"

"Certainly not."

"Nor am I married."

"Not to my knowledge, young man," grimly.

"Explain your meaning, then."

"To do so I am compelled to disclose a secret that belongs to your father; swear to me that you will be guided in this matter by me, and I will then speak unreservedly."

"I promise you, sir."

"Then listen to me. You know Mrs. Perry?"

He starts eagerly.

"How is she connected with the matter?"

"You shall soon know, Robert. Since you have been in her company have you ever noticed anything strange in her actions toward you?"

"I always flattered myself she thought more of me than I deserved; that she was a dear, sweet little woman, whom I regard highly."

"She loves you."

"Eh?"

"Devotedly. And why should she not? Robert, can it be possible that some inward monitor has never warned you of the truth?"

"The truth—what can you mean?"

"That lady bears a sacred relation to you. Can you not guess it now?"

"Good Heavens, man, I am stupefied. Keep it back no longer. What is she to me?"

He clutches the table, and leaning forward, looks me full in the eye.

I calmly say:

"Your mother!"

The words are simple, but the effect proves tremendous. Robert fairly gasps for breath.

"My mother! Man, she is dead."

"You are mistaken. You have been led to believe that, but it is not so. She lives, and in Mary Perry you behold the lady who was once Mary Blackmore, but whom the courts separated from your father many years ago."

He is more amazed at the fact and delighted in the thought of finding a mother than anything else. As yet it has not even entered his poor head what effect this thing must have upon his love suit, since Rebecca is lost to him.

Thus he insists on my telling the whole story, which I do in my most effective way, meaning to make an impression.

Robert drinks it all in eagerly.

Strange emotions thrill him.

He has long had the most powerful affection for his father, and now a new feeling takes possession of his soul.

It is the love for his mother.

He believes already in her innocence; I can see that plainly, and will make a stout champion for her long shadowed cause.

What a shame Blackmore married again.

With such a combination I believe it would be possible to bring about a complete reconciliation between the long-estranged couple, and how delighted I would be to have a hand in it!

I open Robert's eyes gently with regard to another fact, relating to Rebecca.

She must be his half-sister.

The knowledge stuns him, but he bears up under it most manfully.

I like him better than ever for it.

Between us we canvass the matter thoroughly, and decide that there is only one course open to him as an honorable man.

This is to see Rebecca no more until his father gives him permission to seek his mother.

He promises to do his best to refrain from telling the young girl his secret.

I believe he can be trusted as far as any man, but do not envy him his feelings.

A sister is all good enough in her place, but what man can delight to hear the girl he loves say she will be such to him?

Soon Bob will endure new agony.

He has found a sister, but lost a wife.

So I leave him—for a time.

I ask him to change a large bill for me, which he does unsuspectingly.

Among the fives given to me I fail to discover one with the red letters on it.

My first effort has not been a success.

Next I seek one who knows Bob well—a man in good society, but inclined to be wild.

Without arousing his suspicions, I manage to get him started upon the subject, and soon learn all he knows.

It is to Bob's credit.

Few young men with the money he has, and an easy-going father, would resist the temptations of a great city like Chicago.

He has gambled a little, but long since given it up, before he felt the tiger's claws.

I am more than ever proud of our Bob, and feel pretty certain he is bound to come out of the scrape with flying colors.

Of course, there is no certainty.

I am an old campaigner, and I know that even when the leading horse seems to have a dead set thing of it, he sometimes fails.

Bob appears a sure winner, but it is too early in the race to make certain.

It is about ten o'clock when I find myself in the neighborhood of the banker's house.

I intend to let him know what progress I have made, and assure him on my life that there was no other way of convincing Bob—that he would not have believed me had I lied about the girl, and I could not have the heart to cover up the banker's misfortunes of the past by throwing a load upon her innocent shoulders.

As I near the house I stop.

Some one descends the steps.

It is a woman, closely muffled, and yet from her manner I detect the lady—no boor ever steps so lightly and gracefully as that.

Of course, I am interested.

I watch her go past, hidden as I am by a tree-box on the edge of the pavement.

Who can she be?

I intend following her in order to find out, and bless my lucky stars that I happened on the spot just at the right time.

Down the street she moves, without even one glance behind.

Evidently she has no reason to fear pursuit of any kind.

Turning several corners, she finally reaches West Madison, where I see a man join her.

They walk slowly on, talking.

He seems quiet but positive, while she appears to entreat some favor.

Is she in his power?

I use my eyes to the utmost, desiring to be sure something passes from her hand to his, and if I only make certain of this I will believe that I have made progress in the game.

At last it occurs.

She reluctantly hands him something which he stops over to examine closely, as though it is a matter of so much importance that he should know just what he is receiving.

At this I slap my thigh exultantly.

Now I feel something beyond suspicion—a dead taint begins to arise.

The banker has a serpent in his household, but it is not Bob.

When the truth becomes known he will receive a shock but not of the same nature as he feared.

I watch the couple still.

They attract some little attention from passers-by, her face is concealed by the hood and veil.

All the while I am planning.

Soon they must separate.

Which shall I follow?

The man has the money, I am sure, and therefore it is to my advantage that I keep an eye on him.

She will return to the house from whence she came, and I can later on see about that end of the business. Presently what I have anticipated takes place.

They part.

The woman, I believe, upbraids the man, and he laughs at her in a cold-hearted way.

Undoubtedly he is a villain to the core, and I make up my mind that while I may have some trouble with the man, it will not cause me any uneasiness if I hurt him in the transaction.

So I allow the unknown hooded and cloaked female to pass on, and keep my eyes glued upon the figure of the man she has just left.

Before a great length of time has elapsed I manage to play my part so well that I shall see the color of his money and thus decide whether he has received the banker's stolen roll or not.

Trust a man of my size for accomplishing such a piece of business!

CHAPTER IV.

A LONE HAND.

The fellow is well satisfied with himself.

I can tell that easily enough from the different gesture he makes.

Having, through fear of him, forced a woman to hand over an amount of money, he now goes to spend it, little dreaming of the Nemesis close upon his heels.

I have not had a good look at his face, yet I set him down as a coward.

This comes from his action.

Any man who would bully a woman, and take money from her as this fellow did, must be a disreputable character.

Even among thieves, he would be looked down upon as a sneak, for they have their grades, or caste, quite as much as people in the better walks of life.

Just as I expect, he makes for the central part of the town, boarding a Madison street car.

I manage to get upon the same conveyance.

Thus I finally look him in the face.

He is not a bad-looking man, but there is something about his expression that rubs against the grain.

In a word, I do not like him.

There is nothing of disappointment to me in this, for I have not expected anything else. Indeed, it would have amazed me exceedingly had I discovered anything to admire in the man.

Crossing the bridge over the Chicago River, that black waterway holding so many dark secrets under its noisome shroud, we soon reach South Clark street, and here my man gets up to leave the car.

I am before him.

When he lands, I stand on the curb and watch him drop from the step.

His way of doing this gives me a pointer. The fellow is no city-bred man, but seems something of a stranger to street car life. Instead of the graceful, forward step taken by those brought up to the true method of leaving a street car, he steps boldly out, and almost loses his balance.

I follow him.

A short time later he enters a place not far from Jackson street, where a game is carried on.

The authorities make a spasmodic attempt to raid, but, standing in with them in political matters, the gamblers have little to fear.

I can lay my hand on twenty games, boldly and defiantly played within half a mile of the police headquarters; but although these facts are well known, the officers dare not make a raid, being bound hand and foot.

Into this place I go.

My man, it seems, has a decided penchant for gambling, and this is the place where he comes to risk the money just received from the hands of a cowed woman.

I am eager to make a discovery.

If I can only get possession of one of his bills, I can make sure of a certain point.

The banker informed me, the reader will remember, that many of the bills, coming from one source, no doubt were marked with red ink.

Would I find the figures six and seven on any bills that this man handled?

If so, it would convict him.

In order to accomplish such a task, I must necessarily enter the game.

Although not passionately fond of gambling—thank Heaven for it! I can usually play a fair game, with the assistance of luck.

Hence I am not at all averse to entering the deal with my quarry.

My backer will recoup me for my losses, in case such occur while I am endeavoring to discover positive evidence.

If what I suspect at present turns out to be the truth, the banker will not scruple at any expense in order to screen the guilty one.

A member of his household—but not Bob.

I confess to a feeling of intense satisfaction at the thought that Bob is not guilty.

He has won my esteem.

So I watch my chance and enter the game, sitting by the croupier in order to keep an eye on the money he rakes in.

Whenever my man takes more money out of his pocket I watch like a hawk to see where it goes.

Thus it happens that I pay very little attention to the game, and when I win it is simply luck.

What does it matter?

A drunken man has been known to clean out a gambling bank; fortune enters into every game to a great extent.

I win.

Five minutes later I lose.

Then luck comes my way again.

As it happens my man is on the losing side as usual. He has tough luck.

I purposely wager the same amount that he has taken from his pocket and put up.

As I expect, the croupier, quick to save himself trouble, rakes the other's little pile of notes over to me.

That is good.

I can now ascertain whether any of the marked notes are among them.

No fear of my man noticing me. He is too deeply interested watching the game, being infatuated with the devilish process by means of which fortunes are won and lost.

I drop out of the next deal, pretending to be counting up my resources.

As I hope and really expect, I come upon several small bills—fives—marked with the red figures that give the game away.

This is evidence enough for me.

I rise from the table.

My place is at once taken, and the game rolls on.

Quite a cluster watch the turn of fortune's wheel, either too timid to play themselves, or the limit being too high on this night to suit them.

Only the high rollers are in.

I have lodged the little roll of money containing the marked bills in my trousers pocket, and do not mean to risk their loss.

My curiosity is excited concerning the man from whom they came.

Who is he?

What power does he hold over the head of a woman in Alexander Blackmore's household that would make her commit a bold robbery in order to buy his silence?

These are things I desire to know.

They must come my way before I give the case up, and every part of the matter will be sifted to the very dregs.

He plays on.

Ill-luck haunts him.

Again and again he loses; such a remarkable run attracts attention, and many persons watch him with great interest.

He at least proves game.

Loss after loss is made with perfect *sang froid*.

Money that has been easily gained can be frittered away just as carelessly.

Some of the lookers-on admire his grit.

I know from whence it springs, and can see nothing admirable in his actions.

Even such a fat roll as the one he possesses must finally collapse under the steady strain.

From a thousand dollars his losses creep up to near the double line.

At this rate the money the banker lost will soon line the pockets of the major's pets.

I make no sign.

Let it go; Blackmore has plenty, and silence is of more value to him.

While I watch my man at his unfortunate play, I am forming my plan of action.

The money seems accursed. It brings no good luck to him at least.

When he has managed to unload entirely, perhaps he will leave the place.

I mean to follow.

A chance will then have arrived for me to put my oar in.

Introducing myself, I can arouse his fears, and force a confession from his lips.

All this seems easy enough, and when I can once get a good start, I expect plain sailing.

He plays on.

As he draws near the bottom of his pile, he becomes a little more cautious, but it does not seem to serve him in the least.

The same demon of hard luck pursues him. Had the woman who gave him the money placed her curse upon it, the effect could hardly have been more disastrous to the man.

I can see the end near at hand.

It comes in an entirely different way from what I expect.

Although the man has played so steadily and in an apparently cool manner, his exterior belies the inward state of his feelings.

He burns with fury.

Such a wonderful run of hard luck seems out of all common reason, and he makes up his mind that a combination has been formed to fleece him—that all others in the room are set against one man, and that individual himself.

This is a strange idea for him to conceive, but I learn that it does take hold of him.

He makes no sign until the end comes.

At last he counts the balance of his roll.

Just fifty dollars left of the pile!

He tosses this upon the table.

"Game to the last!" I heard one man say.

"It will go the same way as the rest."

"I don't know. I've seen the last dollar change the luck, and the bank broken."

"Well, watch and see."

"He deserves some luck, anyhow."

"Who the deuce is he?"

"I believe a California gold miner. Some one gave me that idea."

"Shouldn't wonder. He doesn't belong in Chicago, that I'm sure of."

"There it goes."

The game opens and the whispering ceases.

I am interested, too.

A California gold miner—what authority have they for believing so?"

I chance to know where his money comes from, and as to his looks, he might be a cowboy from Texas for all of that.

Does he win?

That would indeed be a singular thing, considering the run of ill-luck that has followed his trail, and the fact that his last stake is out.

As usual, the red wins while he has put his pile on the black.

He has lost.

When the croupier gently draws his pile away to add

to the snug fortune the bank has made, the man seems to awaken.

His face is in one way a strong one, and I can see a terrible look crossing it now.

What will he do? What can one man do when opposed by a score of gamblers?

I expect him to hasten from the den with curses on his lips, and to find him in a desperate frame of mind, which I can take advantage of in order to work my own little scheme.

Nothing of the sort occurs.

The man looks around him.

In that scowling face I am reminded of a wildcat I once wounded, and which turned at bay, ready to fight to the death.

He is a fit representative of that animal.

The game was ready to start again; this time without the high roller who had spent his pile.

I can see that he comes to a sudden desperate determination.

Rising to his feet, he calls out in a voice husky with rage:

"Stop the game!"

"Well, what is it, my friend?" asks the dealer.

"I have been robbed."

"Nonsense!"

"This game is not conducted on the square; you are all leagued against me. I haven't had a show all the time, and I know it."

"You are mistaken, friend."

"I know what a square game is; I always play that way. Now, I'm going to have every dollar back."

"Come, come, don't be foolish."

"You don't know me, man. I'd as soon kill you as eat my supper. Dealer, pass that pile along, or I'll murder you in cold blood. You've heard of me before, I reckon. I'm Jesse James, of Missouri, and I let no man rob me."

CHAPTER V.

A BOLD IMPOSTOR.

Really this is the most astonishing thing I have ever met with in one of these gambling dens, and where strange events often come to pass.

Jesse James in Chicago?

Such boldness almost surpasses belief.

With a heavy reward hanging over his head, it seems incredibly foolish for the man to even visit the great city on Lake Michigan; but to thus openly avow his identity is madness.

Still, it is just like the man.

I look sharply at his face, knowing the King of Bandits fit well, having once been his prisoner.

The man certainly looks like Jesse James, and yet I think I see certain marks of difference.

Still, it is some years since I saw the outlaw. He may have changed in the meantime.

As the man boldly declares himself, and boldly announces his intention of having every dollar of his money back again, he prepares to enforce his demand.

Where it comes from, I am not prepared to state, but from some portion of his garments there suddenly springs a revolver.

It is none of your little pop-gun affairs, but a deadly-looking weapon.

The man has done terrible execution with this same seven-shooter in times past.

He levels it.

The dealer of the game is an old player who has doubtless seen something in his life, and can keep cool under almost any ordinary danger.

When he finds himself covered by the gun of such a notorious desperado as Jesse James, he turns as white as a sheet.

I do not blame him.

It is not my policy to interfere, since I have a game in view.

Perhaps something similar to this thought flashes into every mind.

One man keeps his hands off because it is no affair of his anyhow.

A second has some business ahead; he is following out a set rule in playing to break the bank, and if he lets up now it will ruin all.

A third has even a better reason.

His life is heavily insured, and he does not see why he should take the chances of allowing some fellow to marry his widow for the sake of the small fortune that will come to her at his death.

It is so easy to find an excuse when one's inclination runs that way.

They are as thick as blackberries in August.

Besides, taking it all in all, this is none of their affair—the man gives them warning that he will brook no interference.

"Gentlemen, I mean you no harm, but I am determined to recover what has been taken from me by fraud. Please pay attention to your own business, and no one will be hurt. The man who meddles with my affairs, dies."

He meant every word of it.

No one showed any signs of meddling, even though the dealer must have had friends among those present.

They did not court death.

As a spectator I watch the scene, and am greatly interested in all that occurs.

Mentally I photograph it on my mind, to be recalled some future time.

The man with the revolver, having effectually cowed the crowd, can now turn his full attention to the miserable dealer.

It is astonishing the change that has come over this man in so short a time.

Five minutes before he sat there in all his pomp and magnificence, the ruler of men's destinies, his voice full of scorn as he announced the rulings of the game—now he cringes there under the eye of the desperado, his hands clutching the arms of his chair in a weak state.

The other has cowed him with his look.

"Pass along my money, dealer, or you are a dead man, if my finger presses this trigger," says the outlaw, with force.

I have marked him down as a coward before, on account of his having taken money from a woman who is in his power.

As I see him thus subjugate a whole roomful of men, I confess that my ideas on the subject are a little mixed—decidedly so, in fact.

"How much?"

The dealer no longer clasps the arms of his chair, but his hands nervously finger the pile of money before him. Resistance he does not dream of.

He realizes that this man holds the balance of power, and that it is death to refuse his demand.

So he gives in to superior power.

I listen for the reply with more than ordinary eagerness, for it will give me a clew.

"Twenty-three hundred," says the man who believes he has been swindled.

The dealer begins to toss bills into a small heap.

I chuckle softly in the exuberance of my feelings, for I have made a good connection.

Twenty-three hundred!

That is the exact amount the banker declared he had in his library safe, and which so mysteriously disappeared.

I am morally certain that I have seen every dollar of the stolen money staked upon the game on this green baize table.

There are some things in connection with the affair, however, that need the closest scrutiny, and it is my resolve to give them such.

The dealer ceases his count.

With his little rake he shoves the pile in the direction of the man who has cut the claws of the tiger in his den.

"There is your money. We don't do things in this way generally, but it does not suit the house to have a row here. Our customers are usually gentlemen—some-

times they win handsome sums, but when they get pinched they never squeal and talk of being cheated."

The dealer has recovered a little of his nerve, or he would hardly dare speak thus.

The man who claims to be Jesse James draws the money toward him.

With one hand he doubles it over, making one great wad out of it.

There is no time for counting.

He does not wholly trust the dealer, who very probably owns a revolver, and may take advantage of an opportunity to use it.

This wad of money the man shoves far down into one of his trousers pockets.

The dealer ignores his presence.

Rapping upon the table sharply, he says:

"Play, gentlemen all."

I watch the man who has so boldly declared himself to be the Missouri desperado.

He steps back from the table.

The game goes on.

Having money at stake, the players seem to entirely forget his presence, and pay attention to what is taking place on the board.

Only the few spectators—among which I count as one—cast an occasional glance that way.

Moodily he stands back a short time, and watches the game eagerly.

I believe he would like to go into it again, but knows all present would refuse to play.

At length he turns.

Is he about to leave?

If so, my time has arrived.

I manage to get out ahead of him, and lie in wait below, for it will be remembered that I formed my plans while he was playing.

The fact that my intended victim turns out to be a notorious man makes little difference in my ideas of how the campaign should be conducted.

I mean to follow him.

When the time comes to strike home, perhaps Jesse James will learn that there is at least one man in Chicago who does not fear him.

He comes.

Having, as he believes, left all his foes behind him in the gaming den, the man does not show much evidence of caution.

Before I can start to follow him, I am surprised to see a second figure leave the house.

This party takes after the first.

As he passes under a gas lamp, I learn that it is not the dealer. It must be some spectator whom I have paid little attention to.

To my surprise, he follows my man.

I take after him.

A strange procession we make, passing along the street in one, two, three order.

There are quite a number of people abroad at this hour of the night, when respectable portions of the Lake City seem deserted, men and women, yes, and even boys, through South Clark and State street.

The majority are out for no good.

They serve a purpose now.

As I follow the men ahead, they do not know the fact, and the same thing answers in connection with the second party tracking the first.

Where are we going?

What business has this second man to step in and dispute my game?

That is what I call assurance.

I endeavor to guess what his motive may be in connection with the outlaw, and come to the conclusion that he must be some detective who had chanced to be present, and desires to secure the large reward offered for the apprehension or death of the man who has terrorized the railroad companies operating in Missouri and in the Northwest.

This is trespassing on my ground.

I do not like it.

Perhaps we might join forces, and accomplish more work that way.

This thought comes to me while I am following the two men down Clark street.

We pass Randolph street.

It begins to look as though the outlaw were heading for the north side.

Lake street.

The bridge over the river is only about a block further on, and he still keeps it up.

One place is as good as another to me, if I can only get my work in.

I notice something.

The party between the outlaw and myself has crept up considerably on his quarry, and when the bridge is reached is only a short distance behind.

Thus we are almost in a string, with perhaps twenty feet between each man.

Ah! the other quickens his pace, as though he intends overtaking his man.

Something is about to drop.

I mean to be in at the death, and therefore also add an impetus to my pace.

In the darkness they do not notice me; we are in front of a building that is being erected, and the spot seems to have been purposely selected by the second man for his climax.

He passes alongside the other.

Both men come to a pause, and, bending down, I creep closer to hear what passes between them.

Thus, I am able to catch their words, for they do not dream that an eavesdropper hovers near.

"My friend, a few words with you, please," says the unknown follower.

I do not know whether he places his hand on the other's arm or not, but imagine so.

"Hands off, stranger. I'm loaded to kill, and would just as soon shoot as not. Now, what d'ye want?"

The second man gives a laugh.

He is even a cooler customer than the first.

"I was in that den."

"You were, eh?"

"I saw and heard all that took place."

"Well, I ain't ashamed of it, I reckon. Have you followed me here to say that?"

"No; I want something."

"Perhaps you'll get more'n you want."

"No danger. You ordered back that money on the strength of a name those gents seemed to fear."

"That's so."

"They believe Jesse James took that money."

"Well, I reckon he did."

"Since I've got the name I might as well have the game. Hand over that wad of money, you impostor. You are a fraud; call yourself by another man's name, will ye! Out with the wad, you shark, or I'll make mince-meat of you. I know you, Tom Travis, and you do me, I reckon."

"Death and furies," gasps the other, "it's Jesse James himself!"

CHAPTER VI.

JESSE JAMES HIMSELF.

Really the game grows in interest amazingly.

I begin to believe I shall enjoy it after all.

It promised to be prosaic, but I realize that such is not the case.

There are two Richmonds in the field, and the one has unmasked the other.

So it was not Jesse James at all who braved the gamblers, and carried off the money he had lost, but an ordinary, everyday fellow by the name of Tom Travis.

It didn't seem to me that it could be Jesse James.

The man who cowed the gamblers has met his match.

He recognizes a master.

The only and original Jesse James possesses a sort of terrorizing influence over the man who has been playing his part.

I can see even without eyes that the impostor hangs limp and nerveless.

"This is a rum go," he gurgles, "who'd ever suppose you was in Chicago, in that place and at the very hour? I'm done for."

"You will be pretty soon unless you comply with my demands. I've every reason in the world to lay you out right here; don't tempt me."

"I reckon I won't. But, Jesse, this ain't treatin' an old pard just square."

"You took my name; I must have the game."

"It's hard on me. Just excuse this one thing. I don't know what tempted me to say it."

"You whining cur, you've fixed yourself out to look like me. Don't deny it. Nature made you resemble Jesse James in looks, but she can't put the heart of a lion into the body of a coyote."

"Thar you've got me. I'm no coward when it comes to ordinary men. You saw that with your own eyes to-night; but I can't resist you."

"The money."

"Now, if you'd only divide, and give me a show to get on, I'd think it a square go. Say, you take fifteen, then, and leave me eight."

There is pleading in his voice; just such a tone as a slave might use in addressing a master.

"Hand over the wad; I won't speak again."

Travis groans.

He dares not defy this man.

It would cost him his life.

I cannot see him do it, but hearing the other give a satisfied grunt, realize that it has been done.

"Tell me why you are here?" now asks Jesse James.

"I don't mind that. I've got a pull on a certain party, and mean to live in clover. The wad now in your pocket is the first installment."

"That's an old game with you, Tom."

"Never had one like this. Reckon I'll get enough out of her to last me all my life."

"It's a woman, then?"

"Well, I didn't mean to give it away, but since you've guessed it I might as well admit it."

"That's a little queer."

"How so?"

"You're being on such a lay, and taking my name. It's a woman who has brought me to Chicago."

"Indeed. Hope you have as good success as I have found."

"Perhaps I may, though I reckon my work ain't in the same line as yours. I've done some devilish things in my life, and seen some pretty rough experiences, but I don't believe Jesse James ever persecuted a woman."

Somehow I like the genuine article much better than the spurious.

Like all imitations this lacks the principal ingredient of the copied article.

He is cowardly by nature, though reckless at times and will descend to any base depth in order to fill his pockets.

I despise such a man.

He is a born rascal, and never sees a higher level than self-interest.

Secretly, Jesse James looks down upon him, too, and has doubtless gauged his make-up in years gone by, when they worked side by side.

"Where are you stopping? I would like to know in case I have need of you, Travis."

"At a cat and dog tavern over here on Wall street, not far from Chicago avenue. It's run by a friend of mine named Jarvis Kent."

"I know the man and the place. You may hear from me in case I decide to operate here."

"Glad to join you. Don't forget me. By the way, where do you put up?" carelessly.

I can hear Jesse James chuckle.

"That's my secret. You can have nothing to do with me. Good-night, Tom Travis."

He turns to leave.

"Good-night," says the other, surlily.

"Remember, no more wearing my colors. I've quit enough to bear without carrying all the deviltry a lot of reckless fools would load me with. I killed one man for that same thing."

"I remember him well."

"Then take warning."

He strides away, and disappears in the darkness before I can pass the other man. I prefer to lose my man rather than be caught following them both.

Glancing at my watch, I see the hour.

Ten minutes after eleven.

Really, this night promises to pan out well so far as my movements are concerned.

I once more head for the banker's residence, desiring an interview with him.

It lacks some twenty minutes of midnight when I finally reach the house—rather a late hour for a visit—but when business is concerned, I know nothing to prevent me from arousing a man from sleep, even at three in the morning.

There is a faint light within, and, although not at a conversant with the interior arrangements of the banker's house, I have an idea it proceeds from the back parlor, generally used as a library.

What does this indicate?

Is Mr. Blackmore out?

I am willing to take my chances.

No response comes to the pull I give the bell, and I try it a second time.

Then I hear footsteps.

They descend the stairs.

Through the stained glass in the door I dimly see the figure of a man descending—partly dressed, and holding a lamp.

The door partly opens, disclosing not the banker, but a man whom I take to be his butler, clad in slippers, trousers and shirt, as though he had recently jumped out of bed.

"I wish to see Mr. Blackmore."

"He's out, sir."

"How do you know?"

"I looked in his room as I came down—the door was ajar, and he wasn't there."

This is unexpected, and I hardly know what to do or say under the circumstances—hence I am greatly relieved when just back of the servant a voice calls out:

"What is it, Bertrand?"

"Is that you, Mr. Blackmore? I was just telling this gentleman you were out," and the butler moves back.

The banker looks into my face.

He recognizes me.

"Ah! it's you, Mr. Lawson. Come in."

The butler goes upstairs again to his bed, and I follow the gentleman.

He leads me into the library sure enough, and I find the gas turned low.

As he raises the flame I notice him yawning.

"You have been asleep, sir," I laugh.

He echoes the sound, and nods.

"Regular habit to take a doze?"

"On the contrary, I seldom do."

"Been losing too much sleep lately?"

"No, I have slept well. A strange drowsiness seemed to come over me. I was sitting in my chair at the time, and laid my head back on the cushion, thinking it would soon pass. Really, I have known nothing from that time until voices at the door aroused me, and I went out."

"When did you go to sleep?"

"Really, I can hardly say, but it could not have been much after eight. My supper was not unusually heavy. I shall have to give up tea."

"Oh, it was not the tea that made you sleepy, sir."

"You think not."

"But something in the tea."

He scans me in bewilderment.

"You speak in riddles, Mr. Lawson."

"Presently you will be declaring I am too frank, sir. Are we alone?"

"Perfectly so."

"No one can hear us?"

"Certainly not."

"Please lock the library door."

This he does in a puzzled manner, as though he begins to suspect something wrong.

Coming back he meets my eye.

"You have learned something?"

"I have learned a great deal, sir. Please be seated and listen to what I have to say."

He sinks into a chair like an automatic machine, without will power of his own.

"Is it about my—boy, Bob?" he asks.

"What I have learned about him only goes to prove his loyalty—Bob is a young man to be proud of, and I quite envy you his affection."

How his face brightens up.

"Why, this is an unexpected pleasure—I thought you had discovered him to be guilty."

"No, no; he is innocent."

"Thank God," fervently.

"But—I came to bring you pain and shame, Alexander Blackmore—the thief is in your house—is one you love."

He turns very white.

CHAPTER VII.

META.

"Go on," he says, hoarsely.

"Are you prepared to hear the worst?"

"Yes. Better that than to hear my boy is guilty. Speak without reserve, Lawson. Your words can mean but one person."

"Your wife."

He winces as I say the word.

"It is Meta, then. Poor child! What could she want to do this for; I have given her all the money she could use?"

"One cannot always fathom the motives of a woman; they sometimes act as does a ship without a rudder, making good time while the wind blows fair, but failing when it changes."

"Tell me all about it, my friend. My regard for Meta is more that of a father than a husband. I am exceedingly grieved to think she would descend to such a way of getting money; but if this is the extent of it we can cover it over."

I shake my head.

"I am afraid it is only the beginning, sir. However, you shall hear the story."

So I begin.

He listens intently, and makes no remark until I come to the point where the man declares his identity before the gamblers.

At this he utters an exclamation.

"I was aware of the fact that she knew Jesse James and his people in Missouri, but never imagined it would have an influence on her connection with me. The villain! I shall——"

"Wait until you hear all," I remark.

He subsides and listens.

I go on and tell the whole business, which interests him exceedingly.

Since he knows his Bob is innocent, he can bear up under almost anything.

As yet I have not spoken of my interview with Mrs. Perry, but having finished the other, I start in to speak of this.

He listens with held breath and bowed head.

I hear a groan break from his lips, and realize that the memories of the past have a hold upon his heart; he has never recovered from the blow he received when the law separated him from his first wife.

At last all is told.

He bears up better than I expected.

"You believe she drugged me, then?"

"Undoubtedly so. This Tom Travis must have sent her a note making the appointment, and demanding a large sum as hush money. She had to go, and, fearing that you might discover her absence, she took this means of keeping you in the dark."

"What do you propose doing?"

"Letting the matter go until morning, and then visiting this Tom Travis at his hotel. I shall have a conversation with him, endeavor to find out what power he has over her, and break it by threats of what we will do."

"Good."

"After we have settled with him, you can have an interview with your wife, and arrange the matter as you please. As to the other affair, I trust you believe what I have done is for the best."

"Yes, I am glad you did it; Bob should know the truth."

So I leave Mr. Blackmore.

I seek my quarters and retire.

Calling on Tom Travis the next morning, I can learn nothing from him. Even threats are of no avail.

He keeps his secret power over Mrs. Blackmore well guarded.

I then start for the banker's house, changing cars at Clark and Madison streets.

While *en route*, I am given a splendid opportunity to think over the matter.

There are several plans that come into my mind bearing on the fact.

In the first place Travis might be taken into custody and searched by pretended officers of the police force.

Should he have any papers in his possession this would reveal the fact.

I thought of another way of deciding this, and getting possession of his secret.

This was to take advantage of his love for play.

Travis cannot resist the temptation to gamble.

I believe I can do what I please with him in that line for, although never a professional player, the manipulation of cards seems to come to me quite naturally.

Supposing Travis and I sit down to a quiet game, he believing me to be a man with money, and not recognizing the detective.

By degrees I can get him excited, allowing him to win and again lose.

Finally, when I have drawn him down to his last dollar I can propose to play my whole pile against his secret.

Knowing as much of the man and his weakness as I do, I believe he will agree, but I will have to make sure that I get my goods before playing, as he may try to back out. I have seen him lose his pile and then demand it back at the muzzle of the revolver, like a coward.

These thoughts occupy my attention until I draw near the street at which I wish to alight.

Perhaps I will not find the banker in.

I have a good idea to ask for his wife, and mention some trivial business, my sole object being to see her face that I may judge her.

She is young, I know, and good-looking.

At length I reach the house.

A servant answers my ring.

The banker is out.

I ask for his wife, and am ushered into the drawing-room, with its rich draperies and elegant pictures.

Here I am kept waiting, but I have anticipated it, as a lady generally has little expectation of seeing any one during the morning.

I stand at the window.

The heavy curtains conceal my figure, while I am able to look out and observe all that takes place upon the street.

While standing thus I receive a shock.

A man comes up the pavement, looking keenly at the house as he draws opposite.

I recognize him.

It is Jesse James.

Knowing the similarity in looks between this man and Tom Travis, I am careful to look again, in order to make sure of the fact, and this decides the matter beyond peradventure.

What does Jesse James want here?

Why should he eye this house so closely?

Can it be possible he has discovered the game of the other, and means to have a hand in it?

Perhaps he knows Meta's secret, too.
 He stops.
 As sure as I live, he mounts the steps; it is positive that means to come in.
 What shall I do?
 The library opens into the drawing-room, being connected by folding doors.
 These are ajar.
 I notice that there is just room enough for an agile person to slip through.
 As I am that individual, I take advantage of the fact, enter the library, just as the doorbell is given a strong pull by the man without.
 Having been in the library before, I feel quite at home here, and note a corner into which I may retreat in case any one threatens to enter the room to see if it is empty.
 Then I almost close the doors, draw a shade or two, in order to darken the room, none too light at its best, on account of neighboring houses, and decide that I have done all I can.
 I hear the girl pass the door.
 Voices sound.
 "Wait here, please, and I will tell Mrs. Blackmore and a friend has called," says the girl, and I am ready to declare, from the tone of her voice, that she has been deceived by the gentleman.
 Jesse James sits down.
 I can see him plainly.
 He seems cool enough, as though anticipating a pleasant interview.
 I am a little puzzled about the nature of his mission here.
 Ah! I hear the sound of a woman's skirts on the stairs; now we have it.
 Meta enters.
 The one glance I get shows me a handsome woman.
 She comes to a stop, her eyes fastened on the man, who seems to meet her.
 "Meta!"
 Jesse James holds out his hand.
 She does not see it, or else she scorns to take it.
 "Is it possible you do not know me, Meta?"
 "Know you? Only too well, you wretch! How dare you come openly to this house, after giving me a solemn promise never to see me again?"
 The man looks puzzled.
 As I grasp all the lines and comprehend what they do as yet, I can understand why he should feel amazed at his reception.
 It is not what he expects.
 "I don't understand what you mean; I gave you no promise. I was in Chicago, and, having some news for

you, came here. I thought you would be glad to see an old friend, Meta."
 She looks at him uneasily.
 "You are Jesse James?"
 "Certainly."
 "Once my friend?"
 "I claim to be still."
 "Yet you have persecuted me; threatened to ruin me if I refused to do what you demanded."
 It is quite a treat for me to see his face.
 He seems utterly astounded.
 "Girl, you are out of your mind."
 "It would not be singular if I were. Do you deny that you sent me a threatening letter, demanding hush money?"
 "I never did."
 "Do you mean to say that you didn't meet me last night, and make me hand over a package of bills, that I had to steal from my husband's safe?"
 "Confusion! No! I repeat it. I have had nothing to do with this game. I am innocent."
 She leans forward and looks into his face, an expression of intense anxiety upon her own.
 "You mean that?" she asks, slowly.
 "I swear to it, Meta."
 "Can I have been dreaming?" passing a hand over her face, wearily, and then shuddering. "No, no, it was real. You are deceiving me."
 "I am not; but a thought has just come to me. I am beginning to see light ahead."
 "Tell me—what does it mean?"
 "This!" and his voice is terrible. I pity the man who has incurred his anger. "You say you have been persecuted by me. There is a man in Chicago who has been representing Jesse James. I caught him at it in a gambling den, and made him give up twenty-three hundred dollars he had forced the dealer to give up on the strength of my name."
 The sum mentioned excites her.
 "Twenty-three, you say. It is the exact amount I gave to that man last night."
 "And you thought it was me?"
 "Why should I not? He had your face, and claimed to be Jesse James. The note he wrote was signed with that name, and it was not you?"
 "I will prove it, Meta. See, this is the roll of bills I took from him. It belongs to you. Take it."
 She draws back with a cry.
 "I could not. It has passed from my hands, and I dare not touch it again! Besides, what use have I for so much money?"
 "Put it back where it belongs."
 "Alas! I am afraid it is too late."

"You mean he has discovered his loss?"

"I believe so."

"You can open the safe?"

"Yes."

"Then put it back. When he finds it he will conclude he must have overlooked it, or been dreaming. Take the money, Meta. It is yours."

She does so, mechanically.

"But he will come again. I know it, I feel it."

"We will see about that," and his face bodes ill for the man who has represented him; "there is a long account to settle between myself and Tom Travis."

CHAPTER VIII.

JESSE JAMES' DOUBLE MAKES A PROPOSITION.

Jesse James has evidently known Meta in years past. There is a bond of friendship that binds them together, and this wild outlaw of Missouri has already proven it by handing back to Meta the small fortune he won from Travis at the muzzle of the revolver.

It belongs to her, and he gives it up of his own free will.

Mentally I score one for Jesse James.

The devil is not as black as they paint him.

No doubt this man during his dare-devil life has committed a great many crimes of which he should be ashamed, and which must blacken his name for eternity.

Under the circumstances, however, it gives one renewed faith in his fellow-men to see such a man, hated and despised by the world, capable of performing a good action.

As for his double, I would not like to be in the shoes of Tom Travis when they meet again.

The expression on the face of Jesse James and the way in which he grinds out his words declare that he means to wreak a heavy reckoning upon the head of the man who has dared to play his part in the drama.

I remain very quiet.

It is no part of my plan just then to let them know of my presence.

Somehow, I have not greatly fancied Meta.

She strikes me as rather artful.

It is evident that she has played her cards well with the banker, and he looks upon her as an artless young woman, trusting her fully.

Mentally I compare her with Mary Perry, and the result brings out the calm, peaceful face of the widow far ahead of the pretty one of Meta.

Alexander Blackmore's first wife possesses noble qualities that are entirely lacking in his second.

I begin to see a glimmer of hope for those in whom I

have taken such a decided interest, but as yet it is decidedly faint.

At length Meta begs her visitor to depart.

I can plainly see that she fears her husband's return and does not want them to meet.

If in any way the banker should learn that his wife had been receiving such a notorious person as Jesse James during his absence from home, it would be awkward, say the least.

When he has gone, Meta flies to the window and secretly looks out, doubtless under the fear that the banker may be coming and see the man descending the steps when she will be under the necessity of deceiving him by some subterfuge.

Then she leaves the parlor, probably to go to her room above.

I can hear her give a heavy sigh as she passes me and mutter:

"All is not yet lost."

The words haunt me.

I feel that this girl has a weight upon her soul; something lies in her past which she dares not let her husband know, and this sin, if such it proves to be, is what I have my faith upon that all may yet come out right between the banker and his divorced wife Mary.

All is quiet again.

It is time I made a move.

There is no longer any reason that I should see the banker's wife, but I would give something to meet the gentleman himself.

Perhaps I had better come again.

He will be in, and the case will have developed a little more by that time.

Then, again, Meta will have made a move, and this will advance the game.

The darkened library has served my purpose very well. I rise to my feet and pass through into the drawing room in front.

Then I smile.

My hat and gloves have lain on the table during the whole interview between Meta and Jesse James.

If either of them noticed the fact, it did not appear worthy of mention.

All the same, I am disposed to be angry at myself for such a bit of carelessness.

Picking them up, I turn toward the door and quietly leave the house.

Peering up and down the street, I look for the famous outlaw, but he is nowhere to be seen.

I go down to the business part of the South Street where I find Mr. Blackmore's bank.

He is not in.

I wait for a while, but the cashier gives me no information.

and that he will hardly be in again that day; that something seems to be worrying him, and he has probably gone home with a headache.

This is unfortunate.

It is past the dinner hour, and, as I feel the need of food, I spend half an hour catering to the wants of the important inner man.

This duty accomplished, I start once more for the banker's house, hoping he has gone home.

Fortune favors me.

Drawing near the house, I am surprised to see a man come out of it whom I at first take to be Jesse James, but when he passes me a peculiarity in his walk tells me I have made a slight mistake.

It is Jesse James' double.

What brings Tom Travis here?

Whom has he seen?

A dozen thoughts flash through my mind, and I try to guess the truth.

Has this evil man come to see Meta openly and force her into paying more hush money, in order that he may keep her secret?

The infernal blackmailer is equal to anything; once a man stoops to browbeating a woman, there is nothing he will not descend to in order to get money.

Another idea breaks upon me.

This is to the credit of Travis' cunning.

He may have believed that Meta would give him more money, and have come to the banker to sell his secret.

Perhaps this visit of Tom Travis may blanket me, as they say in a yacht race, when one boat gets between the wind and a rival.

Nevertheless, without turning my head to look after Mr. Travis, I pass on, going beyond the banker's mansion, for I think it best that no one should notice me ascend the steps—at least, a party who is deeply interested in the game.

When I want to find this man I believe it will be easy enough, since I know where he puts up.

He passes out of sight.

As there is no further reason for delay, I ring the bell of the banker's house.

If a servant takes my card.

A minute later I am shown into the library, and find Mr. Blackmore there.

He is prying up and down the floor nervously, with his hands behind him.

As I enter he holds out one hand and says, with a pleasant smile:

"Glad to see you, Lawson."

I know he means it.

From habit, I glance around to see that all the doors are closed.

I cannot forget what happened in this very room some hours previously—how a conversation was overheard, and by myself.

"Do you know, I was just thinking about a certain Will Lawson, and wishing he would turn up," said the banker, motioning me to a seat.

I drop into it, but his nervousness will not allow him to be seated.

He continues to tread the library floor back and forth like a caged tiger.

"I have news for you," said the banker, at length.

"You have had a caller?"

His eyebrows are elevated.

"How do you know? Was it you sent him here?"

I shake my head.

"Sorry I can't claim that honor, but I saw him going away just now."

"He tried to make a bargain with me."

"Tried?"

"Yes."

"Then he didn't succeed?"

The banker shakes his head.

"I have put him off temporarily. The price he asks rather staggered me. Then, again, what he gave me to understand he could prove made me desire time to think it over."

"It startled you?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Can you believe it to be so?"

He eyes me in a curious way.

"I haven't mentioned a word of it, Lawson, and yet, by Jove, you speak as though you knew the nature of the proposition he means to make me."

"Perhaps I can guess it," quietly.

"Let's hear you."

I choose my words, for I am dealing with a delicate subject now.

"This man, then, proposes for a certain sum of money to prove that you are free; that, although all this while you have believed Meta to be your lawful wife, such is really not the case."

I watch him closely while I speak, ready to turn my words into another channel, if I find I have made a great mistake.

Such is not the case.

My words have gone straight home.

The banker shows surprise, but neither anger nor indignation, at my surmise.

"Lawson, you are a wizard."

"Oh, no, sir; far from it."

"None but a magician could guess things as you have done."

"I simply put two and two together, and the result proves the analysis to be correct."

"It is so in this case. That man offered, if I would pay him ten thousand dollars, to bring me positive proof that Meta is not, and never has been, my lawful wife."

"I understand his motive; it is money. But how does he know you would care to prove such a thing to be a fact?"

Mr. Blackmore shakes his head.

"That I cannot say. He did not explain. I dared not take him up, for many reasons. I desired to reflect. The price was very high, and I wished to see and talk with you."

"Very sensible of you, sir. United we stand, you know. I had a pretty good inkling of this before. I came up to see you this morning and you were not in. By chance I overheard an interview in the adjoining room that threw some light on the subject."

"An interview? Between whom?"

"Meta had a visitor."

He starts and looks sharply at me.

"You mean this man, of course?"

"No; it was Jesse James himself. Came to see an old friend, as he chanced to be in town. She accused him of treachery in coming to the house after promising to keep away."

"The result of it all was that the truth came out, and he learned what the man who had played his double in the gambling den last night was up to here."

"He promised Meta to rid her of this persecution, and I believe him to be a man of his word."

"Yes, but even if he frightens this man away, or even disposes of him, that does not change the case for me. I am left with the same load of uncertainty on my mind."

"We will find a means of learning the truth; trust me for that, sir. It is my intention to see this man and have a quiet talk with him."

"I have another thing I wish to speak about," said the banker.

"What is that?"

"The money is in the safe!"

Ah! I have forgotten that part of the affair.

He is watching to see if I look surprised, and seems taken aback because I am not.

"Every dollar of it?" I ask.

"Yes, but with only three of the marked bills in the package."

"That looks strange to you."

"The money is only part of the same that was taken from my safe. One would think the thief, becoming alarmed, had made restitution, but was unable to replace the same bills."

At this I nod.

"You have come pretty close to it, sir."

"Lawson, I repeat it, you are a magician. What I have told just now is no news to you?"

"Certainly not, sir. I knew that money was in your safe before I reached your house."

"And who put it in?"

"The same person responsible for taking it out."

"Meta?"

"Yes."

"Explain it all. Where did she get it?"

"From Jesse James himself."

"What?"

"Part of this thing you already know. The boy Jesse James, after losing all his money at a gambling den, demanded restitution, declaring his identity, and, cause of the fear that name inspired, and the desired the dealers to keep an orderly crowd, the money was turned to him."

"Some of the original bills chanced to be in the lot. That is why you find a few marked ones among them."

"When explanations were entered into between Meta and the Missourian this morning, he learned where the double had secured the twenty-three hundred dollars, and insisted on Meta accepting it, so that she might repeat it."

"That was kind of him. He took it from his double to believe."

"Yes; since he had the name, he said he might as well have the game. But, you see, no one made anything of it, though the entire amount passed through four hands—the blackmailer, the gambler, Jesse James and your—Meta."

I cannot say what keeps me from calling her his wife, but something causes me to halt.

Perhaps it is the suspicion I entertain with regard to their secret.

CHAPTER IX.

SPREADING THE NET.

I soon relate all that happened during my morning visit, and the banker is deeply interested, as is perfectly natural.

His love for his boy is very strong, and I feel that what has turned up makes his affection all the stronger.

Certainly Bob has shown up true and strong under the light brought to bear upon him.

He has passed through the furnace, and been found pure gold.

The banker speaks very tenderly of him, and, at the rate, the trial has brought these two men closer together than ever.

In that way it has done good.

I indulge in hopes that it may even go further, and bring about a reconciliation between Blackmore and his former wife, and what grounds I have for this give me courage.

When finally I leave the banker, I have shaped my plans to a great extent.

Unless fortune breaks in and changes them for me, I will have the matter in my grasp.

My first destination is the office where Bob may be found.

I find him there.

It is four o'clock, and the day draws near a close.

I tell him of Jesse James' visit and of Meta's action. Then I bid him to follow me.

He joins me, after donning his coat and hat.

As we walk along side by side, although he does not ask a question in so many words, his looks do it for me.

I take pity on the young man, and hasten to relieve his suspense.

"You wonder where I am taking you?"

"es."

"It is to see the widow."

"Mrs. Perry?"

"Your mother."

"What is your motive?"

"You must wait and see. I believe I can give you some satisfaction. Try and be patient."

"It is hard to do it, but I will try, believing you mean for the best."

"Indeed I do, Bob. I don't wish to arouse false hopes in your mind. We will soon be there, and you will learn"

"I represses his feelings and endeavors to appear calm, the effort is almost useless."

"He finally reach the hotel where Rebecca and her mother have a flat."

"He knock on the door, and the elder lady opens it her-

"On sight of Bob in my company, her face shows surprise, but she ushers us into her parlor."

"Then, recognizing in me the leading spirit, she looks at me inquiringly."

"You wonder what is the cause of this visit, Mrs. Perry?" I begin.

"es."

"I desire to settle certain doubts in this young man's mind forever. You have known he was your son for some time?"

"It is true."

"Did you also know he loved Rebecca?"

"es."

"Remember, I do not mean with the love a brother can give a sister, but a deeper affection, such as a man feels for the woman he would make his wife. Did you suspect this?"

"She drops her head and will not meet my eye."

"It is true."

"Following this, you allowed it to go on."

"es."

"What if there any motive of revenge upon the man who cast you off that influenced your actions?"

"She glances at me in a startled way."

"Heaven knows there was not!"

"Then it was carelessness on your part that allowed me two to love, knowing it would only bring them ruin?"

"No, hardly that. Perhaps I indulged in a wild hope and through their love might come my forgiveness."

"What is strange?"

"I realize now how foolish it was. It can never be; I was overcome."

"Madam, will you answer me a question?"

"Ask it."

"There is an obstacle to the union of these two young people?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, is it insurmountable?"

"This she surveys him."

"You should know better than I, since it has been years since I last saw him. Does he hate me so bitterly that my touching him is accursed?"

"It means Alexander Blackmore."

"No, no, he does not hate you, dear madam; but this obstacle; what is it?"

"His will alone."

"What! do you mean that if Alexander Blackmore gave his consent there would be no further reason why Robert should not marry Rebecca?"

Poor Bob, panting, leans over to listen.

His fate hangs in the balance.

It seems to be suspended by a single hair, like the famed sword of Damocles, and with the next breath that support may be severed.

"I know of none, sir, since the young people are of a mind," she answers, gravely.

"Mrs. Perry, you married again after being separated from your husband?"

"It is false, sir!"

"What! your name?"

"Perry was my name before I married, and I preferred to be known as a widow, hence I placed the Mrs. before it."

"Not married—then Rebecca—your child——"

"She is my adopted child—the daughter of a cousin who took me to live with her—Marian Perry."

I jump to my feet.

Indeed, so buoyant does my heart feel that I could almost throw my hat into the air and give a shout of pleasure.

As for Bob—well, the truth dawns upon his mind slowly, and on that account is all the more forcible at the end.

His eyes open wide, and as the climax breaks in on his befogged brain he wraps his arms around his mother in rapture.

At last I take my leave.

I mean to wring Tom Travis' secret from his unwilling lips and then face Meta.

The first may give me some excitement, but I do not dread it one-half as much as the job of sitting down opposite the girl with the magnetic eyes and dictating terms—telling her she must leave Chicago within twenty-four hours and never see Blackmore again.

However, this is still in the uncertain future, and I do not believe in crossing a bridge until you come to it.

Hence, I put it out of my mind, and only think of the task before me.

I may find enough of excitement in it to keep me busy during the night, for Tom Travis is, I imagine, rather a desperate man, and he will not give up tamely.

Later I find myself headed for the North Side, and the tavern near Chicago avenue where Tom Travis puts up.

With my purpose definitely mapped out, I aim for the unsavory restaurant and hotel kept by a friend of Travis.

The neighborhood is not chaste.

Not far away is the west branch of the Chicago River, a noisome stream.

This retards the growth and improvement of everything in its vicinity, on account of the odors, and the class of men it brings about.

On the way down Chicago avenue I enter the police station and have a little chat with the officer in charge.

He gets scent of my game and kindly promises to have his men keep an eye on the house in question during this night.

Should I need assistance a shout will bring it.

My appearance is radically changed, and even the keen eyes of Tom Travis will never be able to see his former caller in the present one.

As this is an old business with me, I know just how to do it to perfection.

My name is Billy Magee.

I have made something of a reputation down in St. Louis as a bank burglar, but the place has grown too decidedly warm for my blood; hence I have migrated to the great rival city on the lake.

It is my intention to do business there.

As a St. Louis man I am naturally greatly in favor of hurting Chicago all I can, and mean to strike a blow at her bloated monopolies before I quit that will open people's eyes.

This is my game.

As there has really been a pretty well-known character with the name I have assumed, I am quite safe in playing the part.

I have known him, too.

Of late he has disappeared, and it is believed Magee must have been put out of the way by some unscrupulous companions in one of the low dives he was in the habit of frequenting.

It answers my purpose well.

I can play the part to perfection.

Entering the house, I corral the proprietor, and in an off-hand way present my credentials.

He receives me warmly, and is proud to have a man with such a reputation under his roof.

I am extremely doubtful whether he ever heard of Magee, as the man's work was not of a national character.

It answers my purpose just as well, and I do not care whether he prevaricates or not.

So I make myself at home.

A number of men have gathered in the place.

They seem to be in knots or clusters, as though engaged in discussing matters.

My first duty is to glance around.

Has Travis come in?

Not seeing him, I begin to believe this cannot be the case.

Where was his room?

He may be in it.

I learn by a few questions that it is in the corner. I stand directly below it.

While wondering over the matter a sound reaches my tympanum that gives me pleasure.

It comes from above.

I would be willing to wager that some one has accidentally knocked a chair over.

This would indicate that there is an occupant in the room above.

Unless I have made a mistake in the placing of Tom Travis' apartment, he is at home.

This pleases me.

Watching my chance, I slip through the door and grope for the stairs.

I move along the odd passage and make for the room at the terminus.

I reach the door.

Here I stop to listen, for it has seemed to me as though voices came from within.

Who could be with Travis?

I am not dead certain that this is his room, but pretty positive.

CHAPTER X.

AN INTERVIEW WITH TRAVIS.

Over the door is a transom made of glass.

True, it is dusty and covered with cobwebs, but I make a peephole if I can only raise myself high enough to reach it.

I reflect.

Am I mistaken, or was it a trunk I ran against just beyond the door in the corner?

An investigation is in order.

It proves profitable, for I find a trunk there—only those cheap, square ones.

When I lift one end I know the box affair is empty. It would not be worth stealing, and the owner not having space to spare in his room, has thrust it into the hall.

Gently I bring the trunk next to the door.

Then I mount my pedestal, which groans under my weight.

As I expected, I find the glass so covered with the accumulated dust of years that it is impossible for me to see a thing through it.

Upon investigating, I discover that the major portion of this is on the hall side.

Hence, it can be cleared away by the use of my knife judiciously applied.

I manage to rub off the dust for a space that is about three inches in circumference.

Then I glue my eye to it.

I have seen all the while that there is a light in the room, and when I have this opening I find no difficulty in observing what occurs.

Is Travis there?

This question is immediately answered in the affirmative, for I set eyes on a man answering his description.

What in the world is he doing?

As near as I can make out, he appears to be staring upon some object on the floor.

Well, I declare, if it isn't another man he has underneath him, and that must be a revolver he holds in his hand.

"Swear or die!" comes faintly to my ears.

Whatever answer the man underneath makes, I appear to satisfy him of the revolver, for he slowly rises to his feet.

The other man also gets up, brushing the dust from his clothes in a dogged manner.

I can see from his manner that he has been cowed, but his face is as yet invisible to me.

Who under the sun has Travis been bringing to the room to bulldoze in this manner?

What game is he up to?

It seems promising of success, at any rate, since the man has evidently agreed to his terms.

He looks up.

What does this mean?

two men in the room are as like as two peas in a features, dress and all.

is the true, the other a false Travis.

Dr manner tells me the truth.

ve Jesse James in the man who holds the revolver, hand is a straight flush, and who has said "swear

e fellow upon whom he has been seated, and who himself up off the floor, is the double.

remember that I heard what I took to be a chair fall—It must have been Travis.

m the Missouri outlaw knock him down?

sibly so.

may be they had a scuffle, and the fall was the out- of it.

any rate, Travis has yielded, and shows by his that he has met his master.

What are they talking about?

cannot make it out.

s men in the saloon below are unusually noisy, sing- and laughing.

deadens all other sounds.

uddenly he shows signs of going.

ust not be discovered.

uch a thing would bring trouble, for the first thought fiery man like Jesse James would be to make use of weapons.

e duel in that narrow hall!

ere are ways of avoiding it.

oe lies in flight.

cannot say that I admire being chased from my y in field of operations.

better scheme presents itself.

s is to carry the empty trunk back to its former on, some six feet away.

less a light is brought into the hall I will run no of being seen.

fforder to make sure of such a thing, however, it may ter for me to hide.

trunk offers the chance.

ff I place it down I raise the lid.

tiptly—yes!

a second is to be lost.

eady the door is partly open, and fortunately the backs out, stopping to say a few parting words to erty within.

s gives me the chance I want.

amber into the box trunk and let the lid fall

ld Jesse James have noticed this?

rdly believe so, as the men below are once more and their racket must deaden any sound as slight

ing tumbled into the trunk as best I could under cumstances, I am on my knees and in a very un- rtable attitude.

an be easily bettered.

re is fortunately room enough for me to turn l, and this I proceed to do.

ength I have accomplished the feat and am hud- in a sitting posture, my knees near my chin.

not a comfortable position, but preferable to the which I found myself at the start.

he gone?

I fancy I still hear voices.

How faintly sounds come to a man shut up in a box—even the singing of the beer drinkers below seems far away from me.

The sensation is unpleasant, too.

It makes one imagine he is in a grave—at least that is the singular thought that comes to me while I squat inside the trunk.

What can detain Jesse James?

Surely he must have gone back again into the room; he would not stand thus at the open door and talk of private affairs.

That was not characteristic of the man.

A thought bubbles up into my brain—what is to hinder me from ascertaining?

All I have to do is to raise the lid a trifle and take a peep—it will reveal what I desire to know.

Quick to act upon this suggestion, I bring my hand around to the proper side and give a push.

Peering out, I see the door of Travis' room closed.

Evidently Jesse James has gone away.

There is still a light over the transom.

I can see it plainly through the peephole I made on the dusty glass.

Could I manage to take a look through that same opening, it would be a good thing; but I do not deem it absolutely necessary.

Rap, rap, rap!

A movement within.

Then feet cross the floor.

The bolt is slowly withdrawn.

As the door opens a little, I see a man standing there.

At the sight of him I cannot refrain from giving vent to a low cry.

Have I made a mistake?

This is not Tom Travis, but a stranger.

Where did he come from?

Surely this is the room where I saw Jesse James and his double have their circus.

Can Travis have departed and a new man already occupied the apartment?

If so, my adventure of the trunk is apt to prove a costly one to me.

"Well, what's wanted?" asks the other.

He eyes me suspiciously.

Something in his voice arouses suspicion and I determine to see more of this man.

In order to prolong the interview, I put a question to the stranger.

"Are you Colonel Ben Loomis?"

"No."

"Do you know what room he has?"

"I don't."

"The landlord said it was this one."

"Then he lied."

"Well, perhaps I can do some business with you, any- ways, friend."

He growls and tries to close the door as one might on a troublesome book agent.

This he fails to do.

The cause is evident.

I have thrust my foot forward in such a way that it blocks the game.

"What d'ye mean?" he asks, in ill humor.

"A little talk with you, Tom Travis."

He starts at mention of the name.

"You've made a mistake."

"How so?"

"I'm another man."

"Are you Jesse James?"

"Confusion, no!"

"Well, I don't care what name you sail under now. You were Tom Travis, and I'm in the humor for a talk with you."

"Fiends take you!"

"Open the door."

He looks as though tempted to refuse, but, thinking better of it, obeys.

I enter the room.

Judging from the hasty glance I cast about me, the man has just about been ready to vacate his apartment.

Travis, having closed the door, looks toward me rather anxiously.

I keep him under my eye.

Such a man can only be trusted as far as you can see him, and he has reached the end of his tether now.

He is undoubtedly curious to know the object of my coming.

As I have mentioned his own name with that of Jesse James, fear mingles with the other emotions that sway him, and he becomes uneasy.

"Travis, sit down."

I push a chair in front of me with my foot.

"I'd rather stand," he replies.

"As our interview promises to be a protracted one, I prefer that you should be seated."

It is the first conflict between our wills.

He gives in.

The victory proves just what I have suspected—that mind can conquer matter.

"Go on."

"You admit that you are Tom Travis?"

"What's the use denying it?"

"Then I have come here to save your life."

"You have?" with a sneer.

"What did Jesse James force you to own up to at the muzzle of the revolver?"

He looks at me fixedly.

"You know about that?"

"I know a good many things, Travis."

"Then there's no use of my telling you."

"Do you refuse?"

"Yes; it don't concern you."

"I can guess it; but that isn't the matter that brought me here. As I said, I have come to save your miserable life."

"The deuce you say!"

"You are in danger of hanging."

"I?"

"For murder."

He shudders and turns white.

"You are only trying to scare me."

"That is not so."

"Whose murder?"

I bend forward and catch his eye.

"The banker, Alexander Blackmore."

"Is he dead?"

"You have not seen the afternoon papers, then?"

"No."

"Found murdered in his library. A knife did a terrible job. You met his young wife last night. He paid you money. It is absolutely positive that one of you must be held responsible for this job. Of course she has no motive, and we turn to you as the guilty one."

"I am innocent," he gasps.

"Then prove it."

"When did it occur?"

"During the afternoon."

"I was here most of the time."

"You can prove it?"

He groans.

"That would be hard to do, because, you see, no one knew I was in."

"Just so. Now, Travis, between you and the post, do you know of any reason why Meta would remove her husband?"

"Why do you ask me that?"

"To clear you."

"How could it do such a thing?"

"Individually, I am under the impression that she is the guilty party, but I have been unable to discover any motive for the crime."

He nods his head eagerly.

"Then, again, circumstances point to you as having your hand in the game. I resolved to let you have a chance to throw the burden where it probably belonged."

He looks secretive.

"I know nothing," he says, doggedly.

Poor fool, I must give him another shake, as a test to see what he does the rat.

"You lie, Tom Travis! Listen to me, man. I am here to arrest you for the murder of the banker unless you can throw the blame on another. Take your choice—either to jail yourself or betray the secret you hold. Which do you do?"

There is little need of the question.

Some men would scorn to seek safety for themselves in betraying a woman's trust, but there are others who would give up their own mother to the clutches of the law if by so doing they could save their own miserable lives.

Tom Travis fills the latter bill to a dot.

I despise him.

All the same I mean to get what I can out of the ere casting him away like an orange that has been squeezed dry.

His mental struggle is of short duration.

Had this been genuine I would give him some credit, but I know his only regret about betraying Meta's secret arises from the fact that with it goes his chance of making money.

He has hoped to live upon this secret, like a vampire sucking the lifeblood of the banker's wife.

Out upon him for a miserable wretch.

His indecision is short-lived.

"I will tell you all," he says.

Satisfaction fills my heart.

At last I find myself in a position to learn what shadows Meta's past.

Will it separate her from Alexander Blackmore?

CHAPTER XI.

FACE TO FACE.

ervently hope nothing will occur to interrupt our
few until the man on the rack has confessed all he

egin operations.
ou confess that Meta has a secret?"
did deny it, but I lied."
n the strength of that secret you forced her to give
oney?"

es."
venty-three hundred dollars at one time?"
something like that."
must be a secret of importance to make her pay out
y like that."

shrugged his shoulders.
hat is but a drop in the bucket compared with what
ected to get. Why, man, I counted on a regular in-
That secret was to be my stock in trade for years
me."

openly boasts of his tyranny, as though it were
thing to be proud of.
am ashamed of being a man and belonging to the
race as this coward.

ou seem to forget that a woman's patience will give
No matter what this secret might be, she would
tired of paying you, and find a means of being re-
l of the burden."

knew all that, and meant to provide for it; but my
is all dough now," with a mournful shake of the

What is the nature of this secret?"
o about my business as a doctor might ask questions
nder to diagnose a case.

he thing leads to another.
e gradually I will sink the steel deeper, and probe the
nd to the bottom.

t concerns Meta's past."
n Missouri?"

es."
efore he met her?"
c year before."
she saved his life?"

le got mixed up with the moonshiners and outlaws
ected with the Jesse James gang in some way. I
ve they took him for a revenue spy. At any rate, he
ed have ed only for her."
and he made her his wife through gratitude more
anything else?"

e shakes his head.
hat I can't say, not knowing. She's a likely girl,
a man might feel proud of owning her."
ne looks and speaks as though he were talking of a
some horse.

at is according to his ideas of woman. She should
vned by her husband.

ere is no use trying to educate a man like this up to
her standard. Water seeks its own level always, nor
ou get it to run up hill.

Whatever this secret is, she fears to let him know
it."

laughs harshly. How it grates on my nerves.

"Well, it would ruin her, just."

"How so?"

"The old man would cast her out, did I but whisper
my secret in his ear."

"He might demand proof."

"I could show it in plenty."

"She has not been what a wife should be to the
banker?"

"Oh, so far as that's concerned, I reckon he ain't had
anything to complain of, though I had an idea she cared
more for the son than his father. But that don't count.
The thing she dreads happened years ago."

"Tell me about it."

"The simple fact is, Meta was a married woman when
she met this banker."

"Oh, my suspicion has proved true!"

This was what I conceived to be the case, and yet never
dared breathe my suspicions aloud, because I had no
proof.

"She was married before?"

"Yes, secretly."

"And yet took the place of the banker's wife while her
first husband was alive."

"Well, she thought he was dead."

"Ah! Then she believed herself a widow at the time
she met him."

"Exactly."

"The same old story told over again. Of course the
first husband was a rascal."

He winces.

"Why do you assume that?"

"On the principle that a bad penny is always sure to
turn up. He was supposed to be dead, but comes up
smiling in time to ruin her dreams of happiness. Yes,
it's the same old story."

"You seem to pity her."

"On the contrary, I am opposed to her, and it is my in-
tention to lift the mask she wears. Already he knows
she has a secret, and its nature will be known to him be-
fore long."

"It's a matter of indifference to me."

"Do you know this man?"

"You mean her husband?"

"The villain of the play."

Suspecting the truth, I score him well, rubbing it into
the skin.

This time he grins.

"I've never met him face to face."

"Still, you know him."

"Better than any living man."

"Tom Tarvis, are you that party?"

The question is direct. He cannot evade it.

"I reckon I am."

"You declare that Meta was married to you a year be-
fore she saved Blackmore's life?"

"I do."

"And that marriage was never annulled?"

"Never."

"You were thought to be dead?"

"Yes; they had me under ground."

"That lets her out of evil intentions, but, all the same,
she is not the banker's wife."

"She knows it. I tell you she took it hard, but there

was no getting around the facts, and she was bound to pay me to keep silent."

"Is that all, Travis?"

"Yes, except——"

"What?"

"She has a little child down in Missouri."

"Thunder!"

"Our child—a fine little girl, just like her."

"Of course, she has kept that fact a secret, too."

"Well, naturally so."

"Then she must return to her former life—she cannot remain at Blackmore's. He will repudiate her."

"Great Scott!"

"What now?" I ask in pretended surprise.

"You have deceived me."

"That would be a queer thing."

"You told me the banker was dead."

"Did I?"

"That he was murdered."

"And you played right into my hands."

"Death and furies! you devil, you have made me reveal my secret for nothing."

"Oh, no, it will answer a good purpose."

"But I am ruined."

"That's nothing new, man. You've been a failure all your life, I reckon. Can you point to any good that ever marked your tracks?"

"What's that to you?"

"Nothing, only I want you to understand that in this game you've been met and outplayed with your own tools, you scoundrel."

"I've a notion——"

"To do what?" I cry.

At the same time I spring toward him and thrust my revolver into his face.

He turns deadly white.

"To give up the whole cursed business," he finishes, in quite a different strain.

"That would be wise, seeing that you are unable to do anything else."

"I might make you considerable trouble."

"Try it and see where you land. The best thing for you to do is to return to Missouri and assume your position as the father of Meta's child. Be a man, Tom Travis."

"Bah! You don't know her. She has her claws sheathed in velvet now like a cat's, but they can scratch once they come out. Why, after what has occurred Meta hates me more than ever and she'd kill me while I slept."

"How did she ever come to marry you, then?"

He grins again.

"Do you know I've often puzzled over that myself. The best I could make of it was that the girl mistook the feeling of hate for genuine burning love. Anyhow it soon changed to hate."

"One thing let me warn you about."

"Well?"

"Beware of Jesse James."

He starts uneasily.

"I've seen enough of him. Under his orders I've changed my looks. After this I don't count as Jesse James' double."

"That's a wise resolution, Travis."

These words do not proceed from my lips.

They come from behind me.

Even before I turn I am aware of the presence of a terrible man in the room.

How comes he here?

Has he been hidden near by all the time?

If so, he must have heard all that has passed and can count on him as my deadly foe, since he is champion, and it seems to be my fate to be her enemy.

It is more reasonable to believe that he has entered by means of the door.

I cannot remember Travis locking it, and the ability is he forgot to do so.

This complication is not to my liking.

Just as the plum falls into my hand, is it to be snatched away by an adverse fate?

That would be cruel.

Obeying the first thought that comes to me, I draw my revolver under the table, as Jesse James, in advancing, faces us both.

"Having it out, are you?" he says, with some sarcasm in his tone.

"Trying to," I reply, quietly.

"If you had obeyed me to the letter, Travis, you would have escaped this."

"I hurried all I could. Besides, how was I to expect such a visit?" with a scowl at me.

"Well, we can have it out now."

As he speaks, the train robber straddles a chair and swings his arms over the back.

In one of these he carelessly grasps his revolver, though intending to use it.

It looks as though I might be in for trouble.

Will he learn the truth?

There is every indication of it, for when the villainous plotter gets it into his head that he can play me a trick by informing, I expect him to jump at the opportunity.

Having it out with Jesse James generally means a fight on the moon.

It is coming; I feel it in my bones.

"Travis, are you ready to die?" asks the man with the reputation.

"That's just about what he said. No; I don't intend to give up the ship yet."

"Then you've told him what he wanted to know?"

Travis grinds out a sullen "yes," with a glance at me that has a deadly sting.

"So much the worse for you, man. He means the facts against Meta."

The cat is out of the bag.

Jesse James turns to me.

CHAPTER XII.

ARREST THAT MAN.

There is the look of a devil in his eye, and I feel that he means mischief.

Still I do not raise the revolver, but keep it close to my side, believing I can get it on a line with his eye as quick as I want it.

"So this is the game, is it?"

"It has been played and won, Jesse James."

"You have set yourself against this girl?"

"Not at all. I was brought into the case to ascertain whether the banker's son was guilty, and from one

ther, we have gone, until finally it has come to
 "You mean to tell him her secret?"
 "I will make my report," I reply, firmly.
 "What will he do then?"
 "You mean with her?"
 "I am unable to state. He is a just man, and will be
 full. Besides she once saved his life. That will not
 be forgotten."
 "What will he do then?"
 "He is not, has not been his wife. What can he do
 to her?"
 "It is hard on Meta."
 "Honor your motives, Jesse James, in trying to de-
 ceive a woman. Believe me, I have taken no pleasure in
 that which has fallen to me, but it was a duty."
 "What duty?"
 "My business is in untangling the skeins that for-
 twists up. This came to me, and I have succeeded
 in clearing away the mist."
 "And in ruining a woman's life."
 "Nonsense, that is none of my doing, man. Truth
 shall prevail. It is unfortunate for all parties that this
 man has popped up into life again."
 "This thrust Travis laughs mockingly.
 "Perhaps I had better go and jump in the river," he
 says with that curl of the lip that I hate.
 "It wouldn't be a bad idea," I remark.
 "Thanks. For a certain sum I'd be willing to do so,
 actively speaking, and never be heard of again."
 "We don't care for the sacrifice, Travis. One would
 think you would feel so disgusted with yourself that you
 would do the act without pay. Wherever you go misery
 follows in your shadow, and you leave a blight behind
 quite poetical."
 "Enough of this. I care to have nothing more to say
 to you, Travis. My business concerns this man here."
 "With that he faces me again.
 "You gave Travis to understand that this house was
 surrounded by police."
 "What if I did?"
 "Do you know I believed you lied."
 "You put it too harshly."
 "When you prevaricated. It is in a line with your other
 about the murder."
 "I confess that I stretched a point. The police are
 in a call, though not around the house."
 "And ready to rush in if you give the signal?"
 "Yes."
 "Well, why don't you give it?"
 "Why should I when my point has been gained with-
 out their assistance?"
 "I'll tell you. Here is a man whose capture is worth
 a hundred to you."
 "Leaving yourself?"
 "Yes."
 "I am not hunting Jesse James at present. When I get
 at lay you'll hear from me."
 "That does not satisfy him.
 "Perhaps I'm hunting a man named Magee. You've
 crossed my trail. Why should I hesitate about put-
 ting you out of the way?"

"You've done things as bad."
 "Granted, man."
 "Well, there are three reasons I know of why you will
 not harm a hair of my head."
 "You don't say so! Name them."
 "As before, my cool assurance has a marked effect on
 this man.
 "It is what he admires most.
 "I take my time.
 "There is reason in it, as the sequel shows.
 "In the first place, if you fired your revolver you would
 have the police down on you with all haste, for that is
 the very signal they would obey. The sound of a pistol
 shot was to bring them in."
 "Thanks."
 "Then again, I believe you have too much considera-
 tion for me to attempt any such thing. I have not
 warred upon you. When I had the chance to shoot you
 dead in your tracks I refrained.
 "That was kind."
 "You will remember that you are in Chicago, and
 Jesse James would find it more difficult to escape arrest
 after a crime committed here than in his own native State
 of Missouri."
 "You spoke of three reasons."
 "Yes, there is another."
 "With that I instantly cover him between the eyes with
 my revolver.
 "I half expect that he will attempt to shoot, and my
 finger is ready to press the trigger that must send the
 guilty soul of Jesse James before the judgment bar, un-
 less the revolver misses fire, something it has never as
 yet done.
 "He has the good sense to know when he is caught
 napping, and gives a short laugh.
 "This is the third reason, Jesse James. You may
 shoot me, but you will die with me. Now, if you care
 to waste your life that way, begin."
 "First, what do you mean to do?"
 "He would weigh the matter and see whether it is worth
 while to take the chances.
 "I have not come here to do you harm. I believe you
 will keep your word if you will give it. Let us call the
 affair quits and both sides draw off."
 "Do you mean that?"
 "I am sincere."
 "Well, I don't think I'm a fool, and since you are gen-
 erous enough to make that proposition, I'll agree to it.
 We'll call it a draw game."
 "You promise me not to do me injury?"
 "Yes, I give my word."
 "That satisfies me.
 "For twenty-four hours I agree not to enter any ar-
 rangement looking toward your arrest; in short, as far
 as I can, insure your safety."
 "Good!"
 "But in a friendly way I would advise you to leave
 Chicago very shortly. The police must soon learn of
 your presence, if they don't know it now, and then the
 place will grow too warm for you."
 "At this very moment the tramp of feet is heard with-
 out.
 "They are in the passage.

"This way, sergeant."

The truth strikes me with appalling force, and I remember that I made an agreement with the police captain to raid the house if I did not report by ten o'clock.

I glance at my watch again.

It is eight minutes past the hour.

This accounts for the noise.

A platoon of police has entered the house, and the officers are even now advancing along the hall, doubtless examining each room under the impression that I have met with foul play.

Perhaps they expect to find my body lying in one of the rooms.

Others have heard the sounds, too.

Jesse James holds his head in a listening attitude. I am forcibly reminded of a deer in the woods that has heard some suspicious sound.

Then comes that voice.

It gives the whole thing away.

He turns on me like a wolf.

"Are these your friends?" he asks, huskily.

"They are the officers."

Like lightning a revolver is in his hand. He turns his head from right to left, like a stag at bay.

"Let them dare to enter!"

I never can forget the picture he presents as he stands thus. Desperado as he was known to be, he does not lack certain qualities that make a man.

It is not my intention that a fight shall take place in this room.

"Put up your revolver, Jesse James."

"I will defend my life. They shall not take me alive," he says, defiantly.

"You remember I gave you my word that you should be safe for twenty-four hours."

"The presence of these men doesn't look as though you meant to carry out your agreement."

"This was unexpected. I had forgotten that I left orders for the house to be searched unless I reported at ten o'clock."

"They will enter here?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And attempt to take me."

"That is a horse of a different color. Will you rely upon my word?"

"What will you do?"

"Tell them everything is made clear, and accompany them out of the house."

"Without betraying me?"

"I shall not say one word about you. I said before that you were free to go. I repeat it."

He looks me steadily in the face.

Then he slowly puts his revolver out of sight.

"I can trust you as a man," he says.

After that I would not break my word, even though the reward were five times as great.

When a man places reliance upon me—risks his life on my word, so to speak—I am not the one to be tempted to betray him.

The police are at the door.

As Jesse James found it, so he left it, unlocked.

They can enter.

I see the door move.

Then it is quickly pushed open.

A number of men enter.

They are all dressed as police officers, and head I see my friend, the captain.

At sight of me he utters an exclamation :

"Alive and unharmed, Lawson! Why, when I came, and you failed to report, I felt sure you must have been murdered, and I came here prepared to find some old rookery but I would find some trace of you. Where are we scoop these two in?"

It is a ticklish moment for Jesse James, and I see him catch his breath.

"No, let them go, captain. I have no use for them."

That ought to settle the matter, but an unexpected *denouement* occurs just at this moment.

Tom Travis speaks.

He thinks the moment for his revenge has come.

"Captain, I call upon you to arrest that man, the notorious Jesse James, of Missouri; and I claim the reward offered for him, dead or alive."

CHAPTER XIII.

JESSE JAMES' LEAP FOR LIFE.

This is like a bombshell exploding in the calm. Entirely unexpected does it come.

I am momentarily confused.

What shall I do?

I have given this man my solemn word of honor. He shall pass out of the place unharmed.

There is a truce for the time being between Jesse James and myself.

True, I cannot promise more than I can fulfill. But I have more than lies within any human power to carry out my agreement can cover this.

This new danger that threatens to overwhelm the old train robbers is not from me.

I have nothing to do with it.

At the same time I feel that Jesse James has had his confidence abused.

He would have stood at bay only for my word. Harm should not come to him.

That meant a good deal.

All on account of the miserable wretch, Tom Travis, who, finding his own schemes broken up, seems to me he can recoup by betraying the outlaw and claiming the reward.

It will go hard with Tom Travis in the future, if Jesse James succeed in getting away.

He is just the kind of man to brood over an affront of this sort, and wait for revenge.

One glance I gave Travis.

He stands there still pointing, and yet half shrinks as though he would secrete his cowardly body behind the form of the police captain.

Already he trembles for the consequences.

I would not be in his shoes, in case the man es for a great deal.

Then my glance wanders over the police.

They appear mystified.

True, there is no man among them but who has been in the outlaw.

His name is a by-word.

It astonishes them now is the fact of his presence ago—almost in their grasp.
 They are like men who suddenly discover a gold mine but which is separated from their eager hands by glass.
 Another thing I can see astounds them.
 Although Tom Travis was disguising himself at the moment of my arrival, he has dropped the false beard while engaged in the interview.
 It makes him resemble Jesse James again.
 I wonder the police stare.
 The man who is pointed out to them as Jesse James is the counterpart in the party who accuses him. Which is easy to believe?
 How can it occur in a brief space of time.
 Moments would cover the span that has elapsed since the announcement was made.
 During this brief interval Jesse James has not lost his place of mind.
 He knows his danger.
 He is in the hands of the police, his goose will surely be cooked.
 Will he give up tamely?
 There is no need of asking the question.
 The man has never been known to surrender, and he does not now.
 He sees the flash of a revolver in his hand.
 Does he mean to stand up before half-a-dozen police officers and engage in a duel?
 No, blood will speedily flow.
 He is mistaken, however.
 There has always been a policy with this desperate man to take no foolish chances.
 When a way of escape opens to him, he does not mean to remain and die—that is about the extent of the matter.
 He has never been able to comprehend how a man can escape from this room, but then my life is not in danger.
 It often opens one's eyes.
 He sees the chance.
 He is a desperate one, too, but what will not a man attempt who sees death before him.
 Although there are windows in the room, one of them is to open into a hall. What it means I could never tell but there it is.
 He turns upon this like a flash.
 He can see him now as he makes a leap through space, the dare-devil that he is.
 Then comes a crash!
 The window, frame and all, is carried through amid a ringing of glass.
 He hears a heavy fall beyond.
 As Jesse James paid the penalty of his rashness? He lies in the entry below, stunned and bleeding, about to fall into the hands of the officers, to avoid whom he made this leap?
 The captain is the first to recover.
 He rushes to the smashed window.
 Beyond all is darkness.
 With a cry, he snatches a lamp and thrusts his arm through the yawning opening.
 Gaining his eyes, he can see the floor of the hallway, but as the light burns feebly, it is only faintly that he can make out the shattered sash.

No human form is there.
 Whatever has happened to the desperado, he has not been stunned, that is sure.
 By this time Tom Travis has awakened to the terrible fact that his enemy has escaped.
 That means much to him.
 He will not know a comfortable night again.
 In dreams the desperado will haunt him, and his life be made a torment.
 He will see Jesse James in every man who by chance looks harder than usual at him.
 This is his reward.
 Treachery generally brings it.
 The police officers glance at each other.
 What shall be done?
 The desperado must be followed. Here is game too royal to be easily given up.
 "Barry, climb over here."
 The captain gives the order, and although the man may not like the job, he dares not disobey.
 Clambering over the broken window, he hangs by his hands.
 "Drop!"
 Down goes the officer, his heavy shoes striking the broken glass below.
 The captain's next move is to hand him down the lamp.
 "If you see him, Barry, send a bullet home or he'll down you."
 "Ay, ay, sir."
 The captain orders another man down, and even a third follows.
 Some one comes back to make a report.
 "He's gone, captain."
 "How do you know?"
 "Sure we found a windy open. Below is a shed. The man must have slipped down the roof."
 "That's bad. A clean fortune missed us, by Jove."
 He looks reproachfully at me.
 "I'll tell you the whole story later on, captain. In the meantime you might run this fellow in and call him Jesse James," pointing to the trembling Tom Travis.
 We decide to turn him loose and let the wretch shift for himself.
 A new terror has laid hold of his heart.
 In the future he will have no time to go about blackmailing women.
 The terror that walks by night will pursue him.
 There is nothing more to keep us here.
 Under the captain's orders the two counterfeiters have been taken away.
 With them goes the trunk in which I had been an unwilling captive.
 The contents of that vehicle of transportation would astonish Government officials when they came to gaze upon them.
 I am satisfied.
 On the whole it has been a great night's work for me, and one I shall long remember.
 The secret which I aimed to get has fallen into my possession.
 I can use it as a lever to bring happiness once more to the house of Blackmore, the banker.

Meta must go.

Since Tom Travis lives, and he is her legal husband, she has no business under the banker's roof; he must be freed from her.

One thing I dread.

This is the promised interview with Meta.

A woman in tears unmans me, but it is a stern necessity that compels my seeing her.

I sit and talk with the captain at the station for an hour or so over a good cigar.

He is told pretty much of everything, being an old and tried friend of mine.

When I have done he understands why I gave Jesse James that promise, nor does he blame me in the least for so doing.

A secret alarm has been sounded, and the news is sent abroad that the notorious train robber is even then in Chicago.

I could not stop it, even if I would.

My promise was made to go as far as mortal power could control matters.

As it happens, I do not have any authority over police circles in the city.

Thus they consider it their duty to search for the high-priced desperado.

Will they find him?

I do not believe so.

Jesse James has friends in the city, and they will secrete him until the chance comes to smuggle him out.

Although I have once more been face to face with the desperado, and have had his revolver pointed at my head, as well as covered him with mine, I do not hanker after a repetition of it.

The next time his finger may give the trigger a twitch, and the result prove disastrous to a certain individual of my description.

Later on I read of his doings down in Missouri, and can understand the feelings of the passengers in the trains he holds up with his band of desperate followers.

With this man to speak is to be obeyed.

I never expect to hear of Tom Travis again, but in a way the news comes to me later that he has been brought to an accounting by the man whose identity he assumed.

When I hear the news I think he must have been a fool to go to that country.

I would avoid Missouri like a pestilence if Jesse James had a grudge against me.

It must be fate that takes him there.

CHAPTER XIV.

PEACE AT LAST.

There is one piece of business remaining which I do not like to think about.

This is my interview with Meta.

She is a woman who has perhaps been more against than sinning, and I am compelled to tell her since her secret is no longer such she must go to Missouri.

The Blackmore mansion can no longer be called home, since she has not been by law, and cannot be the wife of its master.

The other portion of my business I take pleasure from the fact that it brings happiness to others, and rid-
dies misery, and to a woman.

I know she will never go back to Tom Travis and she hates and despises him too much.

I am only amazed to think that a girl of her rank could ever marry him.

Surely she must have mistaken her feelings and re-
placed dislike as love.

Such things have happened before.

Why not now?

There is her child; she must have some maternal affection for it, and will return again with a certain amount of love to her offspring.

An idea comes to me.

I will speak to the banker about it, and feel certain of his hearty co-operation.

He is wealthy.

Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, are at his command, and it would not take much to grant Meta annuity, for the sake of the child, say of about a thousand a year.

Yes, I will soften the blow to her all I can, I doubt she will need it.

Thinking this I retire to snatch some hours' repose before another busy day begins.

My mind is a blank from the time I lie down until a little alarm arouses me at eight, for my late exertions have tired me bodily and mentally, and now that all has been laid in peace, a delicious calm steals over me.

Then I figure on the duties of the day.

As soon as breakfast has been dispatched I hail a carriage and am carried out to the banker's house.

He is just at breakfast.

I wait a few minutes in the library, and then the Blackmore comes in.

Upon his face is a look of anxiety.

had questions there.
 down, after shaking hands, and is about to in-
 me when I anticipate him.
 all over, Mr. Blackmore."
 do you mean?"
 nan who played the part of Jesse James has fled
 city."
 Travis?"
 Jesse James himself?"
 go bly followed suit."
 as Travis gone without telling his secret?"
 cale significantly.
 ot me for that, sir. It is really on account of the
 on he made me that he flies."
 ncession?"
 d his secret."
 concerns Meta?"
 ncerns all of you, but principally Meta."
 me what it is."
 you not guess?"
 er sire to broach the subject gently, so as to avoid a
 nd ve tried to. The nearest I could do was to believe
 ust at one time have done something that made
 nable to the law."
 t is just about the size of it, sir."
 r girl! When was it done?"
 en she married you, Mr. Blackmore."
 tarts violently.
 plain yourself. Why should her marriage with me
 er in conflict with the law?"
 ause it was bigamy."
 , you forget that I had secured a divorce."
 t she had not."
 his confusion!"
 a husband was living, is living to-day."
 hom Travis—" "
 he man."
 flat Heavens! This is overpowering."
 has a little girl down in Missouri."
 re en she has deceived me."
 part. She honestly believed she had been divorced
 n th. Every one thought Travis dead. She has had
 kel shock in finding him alive. You must not be
 all with her, sir. Have mercy. She saved your life,
 . rhaps loves you better than she ever did any other
 being."
 t what can I do, Lawson? After this my house is
 ee for Meta."
 rtainly not. She must go to her child. You can
 n an annuity of say a thousand a year upon them.
 ates Travis and will never see him again. I doubt

if he lives long to bother her, since Jesse James has sworn
 to have his life."

"I will do this readily. I am sorry for her, poor girl.
 It must be a terrible shock for her. I cannot see her
 alone. You must be present."

"Why not have it over with now?"

"The sooner the better, I suppose."

"Where is she?"

"She has not yet arisen."

"It is customary with her?"

"Once in a while she does not come down to breakfast
 when she has a headache."

"This is a little significant."

"I will go up and see."

"She has a room of her own?"

"Yes."

"And you have not seen her this morning?"

"I thought she was down at breakfast, being late my-
 self, and intended going up when your arrival put all
 thoughts out of my head."

"Do so at once, please."

"I sincerely trust nothing is wrong."

With a white, pained face he hastily leaves me.

I fear the worst.

Rising, I pace the room until he comes back.

One glance and I am satisfied, for he holds in his hand
 a paper.

"A letter means flight."

"She is gone!" he says.

"Just so. Better that than the other," I remark, for
 I have dreaded lest the girl should commit suicide.

"Read that."

He thrusts the note into my hand.

It is brief and to the point. I can read something of
 anguish between the lines, but Meta is a brave woman,
 and faces the future calmly.

MR. BLACKMORE:—Accidentally I overheard your conversation
 to-night with the detective. I realize that further deception on
 my part is useless, and throw off the mask. I am not your wife,
 but believed I was until that man came to me—him whom all
 thought dead. I leave your house this night, never to return;
 but I shall not go with the man who is by law my husband, for I
 hate him. Forgive me for deceiving you. I pray for your
 happiness. I warned you that you might live to regret marrying
 an unknown girl, but I honestly believed I had a right to be your
 wife. Do not think of me as willfully doing wrong. META.

That is all.

I think more of the girl than before. She has a heart,
 and under proper training might have made a fine
 woman.

It is too late now.

Fortune has carved out her future.

"Where do you think she has gone?" he asks.

"Back to her child, no doubt. It is the only thing she has left on earth to live for, and in this hour of humiliation her thoughts will no doubt draw her closer to the little girl.

"You can find her?"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Then we will arrange the annuity, and you shall take it to her later on."

"With pleasure, sir."

"Now tell me what has happened to you, for I feel sure you have seen some stirring times since our last interview."

I am glad to see that he does not mourn after Meta—that he has never loved her as his wife.

It makes my other little scheme possible of success—the reunion of Alexander and his former wife, whom I believe to be a noble woman.

When I mention her from time to time I am careful to speak of her in such a way as to arouse a decided interest within him.

He listens breathlessly to my story.

It is full of interest to him.

At its conclusion he grasps my hand cordially.

"You have done nobly, Lawson. I am satisfied with all your work, and can truly say you have earned your pay twice over."

This warms my heart.

It is nice to be appreciated.

I am worldly enough to feel that it is doubly pleasant to have a nice fat check thrust into one's hand at the same time.

By and by, with Bob's help, I manage to bring the long-parted couple face to face.

Rebecca does it.

Meeting Bob's father, she wins his love at sight, and he greets her as a daughter.

Then the banker meets his former wife.

Explanations follow.

All that I learn is that he has cruelly wronged her; he tells me this himself, with tears in his eyes.

She was innocent, but would not defend herself, because he believed her guilty.

Now she proves her innocence in an overwhelming manner, and the banker is overpowered.

It comes out as I have hoped.

Two days later they are quietly married, and take up the skein of their lives where the thread was broken off years before.

Later on Bob and Rebecca are united.

Before that occurs I have made a trip down into Missouri, and have little difficulty in finding the person I seek.

Meta and her child are living at her mother's poverty.

She recognizes me somehow and looks at me, though she fears trouble has followed her.

When I made known my errand, and what she has done, she seems overwhelmed with his kind cries.

It is soon all arranged, and Meta can be in for life.

I feel as though I have been engaged in a good business, and return to Chicago in a rather different frame of mind.

While within the borders of Missouri I had a little fearful lest I should run across Jesse James, which would not be to my liking, for I remember he said about our meeting the next time as morning.

I have no desire to find that ready revolver upon me, and feel glad when once more upon Illinois.

Later I receive a few lines.

MR. LAWSON—By reason of your kindness toward me, I have canceled the debt between us. If ever you come again, I will be glad to shake your hand. All has gone well with the girl. Yours, JESSE

THE END.

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